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# A PAIR OF SIXES



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"FOR THE SWEETEST, PRETTIEST, BEST LITTLE GIRL THIS SIDE OF ICELAND OR THE PANAMA CANAL" . . .

# A PAIR OF SIXES

BY

EDWARD PEPLE
Author of "The Littlest Rebel,"
"The Prince Chap," etc.

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LILIAN LAUFERTY

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1914



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# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"For the sweetest, prettiest, best little girl this side of Iceland or the Panama Canal" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

Edward Peple . . . . . 6

Lilian Lauferty . . . . . 50

"Just keep your eyes on your work, Jimmy, where they belong" . . . . . 76

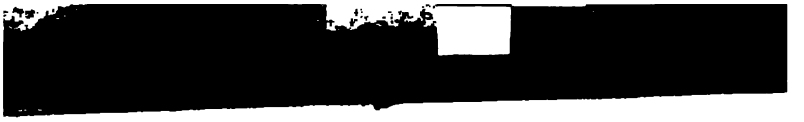
"Don't go in there, Mr. Boggs 'e'll bash you on the 'ead sir" . . . . . 100

"Nellie, you're an awfully generous woman. You are an intelligent woman, and what's more you are a good woman" . . . . . 126

"Pathetic Business for Divorce Proceedings, for benefit of counsel" . . . . . 150

"Something, I fear, has disagreed with her" . 200

"Florence! you Queen!" . . . . . 250



# A PAIR OF SIXES

## CHAPTER I

### IN WHICH A NEW PARTNER COMES INTO THE FIRM

THE red headed office boy smiled at the golden haired stenographer.

"Say! If you was my wife, you know what I would do?"

"Wife!" At the magic word, a dreamy look came into Sally Parker's eyes and she gazed "over the hills and far away," into a region where there were no clicking keys or stenographic notes. Her face took on the sweetly triumphant look a woman assumes when receiving a proposal.

"What would you do?" she asked coyly.

"I'd take you on a weddin' trip—to de very end of de woild!" said James of the slick red pompadour, sentimentally. "And den I'd drop you off," he added.

She shifted her gum belligerently and made a quick little movement that was half anger and half amusement. Jimmy took his red hair and his equally red ears out of target range.

"No fightin'—we ain't de bosses, yeh knows!" said he.

Sally gazed after the boy thoughtfully and gave to her gum chewing a bit of added vigor.

"So, even he notices it! Say, Kromie, do you ever wonder how long our jobs at the Eureka Pill Emporium are a-goin' to last? Sometimes I get to wonderin' if one of the bosses won't force the other

to swallow some of the pills some day, and so dissolve the firm, sudden like!"

The elderly clerk she had addressed as "Kromie" looked up from his desk on the opposite side of the room.

"I don't see why the bosses can't get on. A big, fine business, increasing every month—and yet they are quarreling and fighting all day long. Sometimes I wonder if we are safe to stay with a firm that may put itself out of business any day."

There was ample cause for Krome to fear for the Eureka Digestive Pill Company. Internal dissension was always threatening its little kingdom. Six years before, George Nettleton's father had passed on to the reward of a good and faithful country doctor. His most valuable heritage to his only surviving relative had been the formula of the pill with which he had regulated the digestions of

half the population of the little Connecticut town where he practiced. Son George brought his magic formula and his pretty wife to New York and stormed the castle of fortune unavailingly. Just when things were looking darkest for the Eureka Pills and the young Nettletons, a letter came from George's chum, who had stayed "back home" to invite fortune as the proprietor of Thomaston's chief drug emporium. "You've got a fine pill," he wrote. "The public ought to be made to swallow it. If I sell out here and come to the 'big city' with $500 and a practical selling idea to invest in a business that's yelling for help, will I find you ready to hand over a half interest in the Eureka Pills?"

Nettleton had used up a much needed quarter in a telegram that said: "In the name of Eureka, come!" And with $500,

an acquaintance among the druggists of Connecticut and a harmless purple coloring that made the pills look good enough to eat, T. Boggs Johns had proved a very partner in need.

The Nettletons moved from a Harlem lodging house to an apartment on One Hundred and Fourteenth Street, and the partners congratulated themselves on the alliance that had spelled prosperity. But as prosperity began to spell herself in capital letters, and T. Boggs Johns took an expensive suite of bachelor apartments, and the Nettletons blossomed out in a house in the East Seventies, dissensions rose and sank again in huge clouds that fairly threatened to blot out the business. Puffed up with success, each man came to regard himself as the man who had made the business. The partners began fairly to hate each other. Nettleton regarded

himself as single author of their united fortunes, because his had been the formula for the pills. He wanted the firm's advertising to glorify him. Johns was sure his purple coloring had been the cause of victory, and he wished to be given the center of the stage—and copy. The men were no longer partners who had united to sell a purple pill, they were creatures who had a little article for sale that they wished to have make them known as individual "captains of finance." Two jealous boys with the dangerous weapons of men, money and power, had these warring partners become; and their jealousy, overweening ambition and unreasoning hatred of one another were to bring strange things to pass in the offices of their company before the day was over.

But at the suggestion of what she ha for months been fearing: namely, that



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firm would break itself on the wheel of its own pride, Sally Parker deserted her work to come and have a bit of a chat with Krome. An outsider might have said that she wanted to indulge in a little feast of gossip. Sally high-mindedly told herself that something had to be done to save the business, and that she and Krome were the very people to discuss "ways and means." She left her desk and came over to the big center table.

There she arranged herself in a deep leather chair, and, crossing her knees luxuriously, she pulled out a handkerchief; and with that and the palm of her hand as a buffer, she improved the moment by brightening the already incandescent luster of her pink nails.

At this moment Sally's philosophy was worth more than passing attention, but so was Sally's self, and Krome gave an

undivided allegiance to what his eyes beheld rather than to what his ears might drink in. He preferred a view of Sally's gray "silk-where-they-show" stockings to all her pearls of wisdom anent the Eureka Digestive Pill Company.

"We're safe enough as long as the business goes on fooling the public and making money. Vanity makes 'em fight, and it will keep 'em from separating, too. Neither one of the bosses alone would have anything. Mr. Nettleton doped out a good recipe for the insides of a pill and Mr. Johns is wise to a fine purple coloring and a box that looks as if it went with bonbons, and the two go together. But it's fierce how the bosses stand yelping at each other to see which of them discovered America by making these wonders."

"Well, I tremble for my job, Miss Par-

ker. If you please one boss, the other one fires you."

"And all you have to do is be fired by Nettleton to have Johns hire you back at a raise, they're that sour on one another, Kromie."

Sally uncrossed her shapely ankles vigorously and fled for her typewriter at this juncture, for the office door opened and in strolled T. Boggs Johns, Esquire, sole inventor of the fashionable purple shade of the Eureka pill. He was a large, young man with disarmingly innocent round eyes, a cameo profile and teeth that seemed just intended to flash in a merry smile. His well cut checked suit bore the hallmark "successful bachelor" in every attention-compelling detail.

"Nettleton not in yet, I'll bet," he sneered, and rushed into his office.

When George Nettleton arrived, five

minutes later, Miss Parker was industriously clicking the keys of her machine.

"Boggs is here before noon, for a change, I see," growled Nettleton, removing his partner's hat from his hook and hanging his own brown derby in the place of the sporty gray "bowler."

Sally apostrophized high heaven, "An' now comes the usual morning diversion of gettin' fired a few times because I ain't the Dolly twins and so able to come trippin' into each office at one and the same time when the buzzers sound simultaneous to once with their pretty chimes! I wonder if 'George does it' the same way about running his marriage partnership with Mrs. N. as he indulges in office bliss with his pill partner!"

"Aha! Miss Parker!" breezed out a voice that seemed to just match the blue-serge-clad, white-silk-stockinged, russet-

shod Noble Tailor's model from whom it emanated. "As beautiful and charming as ever, fair Sally Waters, and not sitting and weeping and crying for this nice young man, either, I notice."

"Why, Tony Toler! Welcome home!" cried the stenographer in a voice quite similar to the one she had carelessly wasted on the office boy a few moments ago. But then, it pays a stenographer to keep in practice. Her life is so full of possible young men!

"When did you get in? Did you have a good trip? How long are you going to stay? How'd you manage the conflicting orders you got every day from the two loving partners"—

"Say, little bright eyes—lemme get my breath, and I'll tell you about it between the courses of dinner and hesitating tonight. Are you on?"

"If that ain't like a man, Tony Toler —breezin' in at 11:10 and thinkin' that a poor girl has nothin' to do but sit waitin' for his train to come puffin' in from beyond the Great Divide so he can ask her for dinner without even a day's notice— though goodness knows you might have sent me at least one postal of a Milwaukee beer garden. What time'll I meet you, Tony?"

"I'll be round at 7 with a taxi—in style —and for the reason, watch this, little Goldilocks."

And Tony marched over to the opposite and opposing doors of the partners in Nettleton & Johns and rapped smartly on each frosted glass door.

The doors opened and the frost extended itself to the manner of both partners as they entered and, agreeing for once in a way, looked with astounded and out-

raged dignity at Tony. That young man smiled and nodded, and as they strode forward angrily he held out his hands to stop them.

"Good morning, boys! Here I am, and you are going to love little Tony pretty soon. In fact, I think you are going to slip me a little kiss. But that is not what I want. I've almost—I say *almost*—landed the Northwestern Drug Company!"

"What!" shouted Nettleton.

And "What!" shouted Johns.

"Good boy," cried Nettleton, shaking the "good boy" by the hand.

Johns glared at his partner as he made up for his lapse in cordiality by slapping Tony on the back.

"When will you bring him here?" asked Johns.

"Well, it's not in my contract, but both

of you promised that the day I brought the scalp-lock of the Northwestern you'd make me a partner in this firm—now then, does it go?"

Miss Parker murmured something to herself anent taxis and another partner to join in the scrapping, but her voice was mercifully muffled behind the sheet of paper in her typewriter. Nettleton hesitated. Johns, seeing this, followed out the impolitic policy of the firm and acceded to Tony's demand.

"When I make a promise, Tony, I keep it."

And very grudgingly Nettleton was forced to agree. "Well, I guess he's right for the first time since I've known him. You bring Applegate, Tony, and I'll sign the contract."

"We'll sign it," snapped Johns in a manner that failed entirely to suit his

wholesome appearance of pleasant good-nature.

"You watch little Tony Toler!" cried that young gentleman, arranging his hat on the side of his head and bouncing out of the office in a manner meant to impress Sally Parker and the higher dignitaries of the Eureka Digestive Pill Company. He almost bounced into the pretty Mrs. Nettleton, and, as he removed that cockily arranged hat, Tony Toler reflected that Sally Parker would be as much of a credit to the firm any day as Nellie Nettleton. "Glad rags make the lady," said Tony Toler to himself. "But I wonder who the pretty skirt with Mrs. N. happens to be?"

The pretty "skirt" and coat and hat composed one very charming girl—Miss Florence Cole, of Albany—the light of life in T. Boggs Johns' eyes and also the desire of his heart to no less a person than

Thomas J. Vanderholt, attorney for the firm and warring factions of the Eureka Pill Company. Because Florence Cole was tall and slim and fair, with pansy purple eyes and red gold hair and a childishly alluring manner, several strange things were to happen to one T. Boggs Johns at the hands of his legal rival. And because that childishly alluring manner masked a firm nature that went well with red hair, several remarkable things were to happen to every one concerned. The first thing that occurred, however, was that Mrs. Nettleton was maneuvered into her husband's office and Krome and Miss Parker found themselves dispatched on various and varied errands before Miss Cole knocked at the door of the man of whose desire to marry her she quite approved—though he did not know it yet!

"Florence! Why, bless your heart! What bully good wind blows you down from Albany?" cried Johns, opening his door with a scowl meant for Nettleton. It instantly melted into a beaming smile when a pretty little vision in blue met his eyes.

"Shopping! Came down on a flying trip—swooped on Nellie—brought her along—disposed of her in there. Now, how glad are you to see me?"

"How glad? Say, Florence, you come out to dinner with me at the Valthorpe and I'll tell you a little bit about it," cried Johns, still ecstatically clinging to two white hands that may have been doing a little clinging of their own.

"I can't, T. Father's away and mother is quite alone."

"How about lunch, then, Flo?"

"Oh, T., I'm sorry—truly—but we met Mr. Vanderholt on the street and he asked —and I promised to go with him!"

Mr. T. Boggs Johns' pleasant face took on a grim look. "You couldn't telephone Vanderholt that you had a very important engagement?"

Something in his tone must have impressed Miss Cole, for she promptly took down the receiver.

"And while you're doing that I have a little matter to attend to," said Mr. Johns, and vanished into his private office, from which he returned a few minutes later with hands in pockets and a boyishly triumphant expression on his face.

"It took you five whole minutes to come out of your cubby hole! I expected you to jump!" pouted Miss Cole.

"Aha! but I had a reason! I was digging in my safe for this!"

He held up a little box that plainly bespoke the jeweler's art. Florence gave a little leap to the formidable desk-table and the dignified Mr. Johns deposited his six feet of bone and brawn beside her. He managed to eliminate any visible gap between his black and white checks and her blue charmeuse. As he held up the sparkling contents of the box it seemed as if the office that had reverberated so often to the angry tones of the partners was to have a new thrill!

"Oh, a ring! Two diamonds and a ruby! Why, I—it's perfectly exquisite! . . . Who's it for?"

But even as she spoke Miss Cole began stripping off her long white buckskin glove.

Johns leaned closer. His manner had taken on a quiet assurance that only strengthened the pleading in his eyes.

"For the finest, jolliest, loveliest, most beautiful, most perfect little girl between Iceland and the Panama Canal. For the greatest, most glorious, most"—

Florence gurgled out a little laugh that betokened that the most mischievous as well as the most practical little person between Alaska and Cuba was certainly in the offices of the Eureka Digestive Pill Company!

"Hold on! There's only one like that! Slip it on—with a wish."

And a white finger laid its cool slenderness on Johns' hammering pulse.

"I wish the ceremony—Hello, what's that ring"—and Mr. Johns poised his own jewel uncertainly above the third digit of a certain left hand.

"Oh, that ring! That ring! That's my ring!"

"Exactly! Who gave it to you?

What's it doing on that finger? Did Vanderholt?" Johns was not finding this interview much to his liking. He wondered vaguely if the office were bewitched and if everything must of a certainty go wrong there.

"Your lawyer?" caroled Florence, with a clear little laugh. "Don't you know that if I had a love affair with a lawyer *he* would have the ring—not I. Are you satisfied?"

But even as he slipped his ring on the bare finger where another jewel had lately been, Johns felt eluded and defeated. He opened his arms to gather in the slip of a girl, who seemed almost his for the taking, but she slipped from her chair and put the table between them. He leaned across and caught her hands.

"Florence, I want"—

Florence had a way of anticipating

wants! "Oh, don't! You mustn't kiss me—here. Somebody might come in!"

"Then come in here—my office," begged the man.

Florence hung back, curtaining her eyes before the feeling in her lover's look. She tried to bring lightness of tone back to the interview, with a feminine desire to "eat her cake" in possessing an engagement ring and to "have it too" in terms of freedom!

"Oh, no—no! That would seem so cold-blooded!" she cried.

"It won't be when you get it," vowed Johns.

"No, maybe not; but I guess I'd better risk it here."

So, when Jimmy came in to call his master a moment later, he looked at a tableau that caused him to feel a hasty retreat to be his wisest course.

"What was that?" said Florence, releasing herself in amazement at her own surging feelings, and straightening her hat as Eve must have fluffed out her hair when she emerged from Adam's first embrace.

"I guess it was my heart—turning a double somersault! Come, make it do it again," begged Johns.

But Florence eluded him as the door of Nettleton's office gave a preliminary click. Johns scowled at the door itself.

"Come see my official cubbyhole—dear," he said.

Florence had heard the knob turn, so this time she smiled her content.

Johns continued amiably: "This side of the office represents the brains and blood. That side—the bones and fat!"

## CHAPTER II

### IN WHICH THE OLD PARTNERS MAKE THE FIRM INFIRM

As Johns' door clicked to, Nettleton burst into the main office, fairly sweeping pretty Mrs. Nettleton in his wake.

"You hear that, Nellie? You hear that? He's the brains and blood and I'm the bones and fat! Argh!" snarled the angry man.

"Perhaps he's only joking," ventured Mrs. Nettleton pacifically.

"Joking! Joking! Nellie, I tell you he is doing it all the time! Continually knocking my splendid work and praising his own childish efforts to the skies! What's he done for this business, anyway? I should have left him in Thomaston to

mix violet sodas instead of telling him come here to color my pills and make my life—purple!"

"Yes, dear—of course. But the pills didn't sell very well till T. put this fashionable color on them. The box is so attractive now they can't help selling."

"Fashionable! Attractive! It is all a hideous mess he invented!"

"Now, darling George—don't! It will never do for such old friends to quarrel. Why, T. has been like a member of our family for years. Of course, we all have our little weaknesses, but you don't seem to remember that he may be right and you may be wrong!"

"Nellie!" cried Nettleton, turning angrily on his wife. "What does this mean? How can you dare stand up for T.? Good Lord—when a man's business troubles get into his house it is just about

time to *quit*. Hereafter you remember I'm your husband. This Johns is—a good-looking scoundrel, and you keep out of things!"

"Well, if you take that tone I'm sorry I came to see you. I'll go. No wonder T. can't get on with you!"

"Nellie!" cried her husband reproachfully.

But Nellie swept to the outer door just as Johns' office opened and two very radiant people emerged.

"Going, Nellie?" asked Florence.

"Yes, we are in the way of business," replied Nellie tartly. She glared at her husband and then crossed affably to his partner. Of course, just that mode of procedure was guaranteed to foment the feeling between the two jealous men. "Good-by, T., come up to dinner soon, won't you?"

"I will," replied Johns with malicious enjoyment. "I will come the very first time that George invites me. You may count on that, Nellie!"

Nettleton turned away in disgust and high dudgeon.

"Now, don't you wait for him, T. Come to see me," laughed Nellie Nettleton. And both George and Florence marked her tone for future reference. But T. Boggs Johns rushed on unheeding to his doom—which would have managed to reach him unassisted in any event.

Florence shook hands with Nettleton and managed to put an innocent little sting into the proceeding.

"Good-by, George, I'm glad to find you both so prosperous and happy."

"Good-by, Flo! I'll run to Albany as soon as I can trust George with the critical affairs of the business," promised

Johns. But he did not carry out his promise!

"Hold on there, Mr. Blood and Brains! The Bone and Fat are going to tell you something!" shouted Nettleton in a shaking voice of wrath.

Johns interrupted the tune he was gayly humming and concentrated his beaming smile absent-mindedly on his scowling partner.

"Yes. Pray do."

"Well, if you wait for me to invite you to our house you will be playing music on a harp!"

"Indeed! Well, when I do come, you will be attending business for once—with a pitchfork!"

The two men glared at each other. Their petty quarrels and ceaseless bickering had concentrated themselves into a

bitter essence of hatred. At that moment either man would have wrecked the business and his future career for the sheer joy of seeing the other go down in the wreck. Each had quite forgotten that they were partners, who stood to sink or swim together. And the lust of hatred in their hearts made them fit tools for any man who might choose to use his faculties for their undoing.

"Well, I'll attend to business right now!" shouted George Nettleton. "I've stood for you long enough, and I'm going to dissolve this disgusting partnership today—here—now!"

"All right. That suits me!" declared Johns, with maddening placidity.

"Krome, call up my lawyer!" commanded Nettleton to the poor, frightened clerk who had slipped into his place at

the desk while the fray was on. "Tell him to come over right away!"

"Yes, sir," murmured Krome.

Johns turned to the clerk with dignity. "And you can say to him that I'm just as anxious to see him as Mr. Nettleton is!"

"Yes, sir. I'll try to make it clear to him."

Nettleton and Johns stood looking at each other from the open doors of their offices. If anyone had been there to appreciate the situation it might have occurred to him that they presented the spectacle of a very cocky rooster disputing the right of way with a large, serene Newfoundland. But the situation did not look like comedy to Sally Parker or to Krome.

Sally gasped. "Krome, this place reminds me of the man who had both hands cut off."

"Well?" questioned Krome, telephone receiver in hand.

"And then he got the hives!" giggled Miss Parker, and fell straightway to clicking her keys industriously.

"I guess this is the finish, Sally, for us!" mourned Krome, as he put up the receiver after summoning Mr. Vanderholt.

## CHAPTER III

### IN WHICH HARMONY ENTERS—AND THEN MAKES A RAPID RETREAT

AND upon this peaceful little setting entered Tony Toler and his star customer, Mr. Applegate, of the Northwestern Drug Company. Krome glanced with nervous apprehension from them to the private offices.

"Right this way, Mr. Applegate!" cried Tony with unction. "Our bookkeeper, Mr. Krome! Miss Parker, kindly announce Mr. Applegate," ordered Tony, exactly as if pretty Sally would not be ordering him around with equal facility at their little dinner that evening. "I want you to meet the members of my firm—a team! The finest pair that ever pushed a

pill!" cried rash Tony, leaving the result of his suggestion in the lap of the gods.

"Ah, thank you, Mr. Toler. It will be a pleasure. A perfect partnership should run with the same degree of order as the home affairs of a happily married couple!"

Nervously Tony replied to that: "Yes —that's what we are here. Just one long honeymoon! Ah, here is one of the team. Mr. Johns, I have the honor to introduce—"

But T. Boggs Johns, Esq., put him aside and hastened to grasp the hand of the prospective customer with the warmest kind of fellowship—that induced by the thought of a nice, fat check!

"Ah, Mr. Applegate, this is indeed a pleasure. Johns is my name and—" He interrupted himself as Nettleton appeared in the doorway of his office, and even while poor, hurt Tony dropped un-

noticed into the background in mute astonishment he beheld the marvelous spectacle of one partner greeting the other like a very brother.

"Oh, come in, George!" called T. heartily. "Mr. Applegate, permit me to introduce my esteemed partner, Mr. Nettleton."

He patted his "esteemed partner" on the back and brought him forward while Tony began to beam again. It looked to him as if this finesse ought to be good for a fine large order.

"Have a seat, sir," welcomed Nettleton.

"Yes, do," said Boggs.

Both drew up the same chair.

Bowing to both, Applegate accepted the proffered hospitality.

"Jimmy, my cigars," ordered Nettleton. "And pick up your feet!"

"Don't trouble, George—mine are

nearer!" beamed Johns. "Krome, get my cigars—my private box!"

Nettleton patted him on the shoulder. "No trouble, dear old chap! None in all the wide, wide world! . . . Ah, here we are!" as Jimmy entered with his cigars. "Have a cigar, sir!"

"Thank you! As I was about to say, gentlemen," began Applegate, but he was interrupted by the arrival of Krome with the second box of cigars. Johns fairly pulled the cigar he was just selecting from Nettleton's box out of Applegate's hand and proffered his own box instead.

"Pardon me, Mr. Applegate—I think you will find the flavor of these a trifle more agreeable. *Tobacco* is the one point upon which Nettleton and I can never agree!"

Sally gave a little gurgle of laughter. Tony and Krome gesticulated frantically

for her to stop, and Jimmy, standing at attention, looked on the whole strange performance with wonderment. And then, as he was sent back to Nettleton's office with the box of cigars, Master Jimmy took advantage of the serene atmosphere of the former battleground to supply himself plentifully with smokeables.

"Gentlemen, my time is limited. Let's get down to business," remarked Applegate.

"Happy to serve you in any capacity," chorused the partners.

"Good! It is a pleasure to transact business with two such enterprising, fine young men!"

Nettleton smiled and bowed to Johns. Johns smiled and bowed to Nettleton. Tony beamed. Sally and Krome tried to appear calm.

"Your harmony of method appeals especially to me—a newly married man," concluded Mr. Applegate.

"What!" cried Nettleton delighted, grasping his hand.

"You!" beamed Johns, equally enthusiastic, grasping his other hand.

"Congratulations to you and the lady. I have a very charming wife myself," beamed Nettleton.

"And I am about to have one," cried Johns.

"Delightful!" chuckled Applegate, laughing with them. "All three in the same matrimonial boat. But let's sail back to business. I'm interested in your remedy—through your very bright salesman, Mr. Toler."

"Thank you, sir," said Tony, advancing in the belief that his hour had struck.

"And if I may dip in my little paddle, gentlemen . . ."

Johns turned abruptly. "Don't come into the firm too suddenly, Tony!"

"The Northwestern is going to carry your line of goods. Give me a blank, gentlemen, and I'll sign our first Spring order for—well, say 50,000 gross."

"Thank you, Mr. Applegate," said Nettleton, swallowing hard to digest his astonishment. "Krome! An order blank!"

As Krome handed out the blank both partners reached for it—but Johns got it.

"No, no, T.—let me!" cried Nettleton.

"Oh, I wouldn't trouble you for the world," said Johns, smoothly.

"No wonder you two have made a great success," ejaculated Applegate, and Tony sighed a long breath of relief as he watched a fountain pen come from the gentleman's pocket.

"Thank you," said Nettleton, largely, while something sent a spark to his eyes as he watched Johns filling out the order blank. "And while we are waiting I'd like to show you what I have done to perfect this pill. The ingredients are mine—a marvelous combination of effective, non-injurious drugs. The answer is our sales. Krome, give me the order book and report of our fiscal year, showing sales for the East and South."

Now, although he had been engaged in making out the order, Johns had not been deaf to the fact that his partner was taking unto himself the glory of the Eureka pill. He was now ready to make his claim to fame! Placing the order in front of Mr. Applegate, he struck an attitude of pleasant and frank simplicity and began to chant the praises of one T. Boggs Johns, Esq.

"And I'd like to call your attention to the color of these pills—my idea—mine entirely." As Nettleton tried to interrupt with the tale of the pill's ingredients, Boggs waved him aside, and went on in lordly fashion: "The coating is made from the best refined beet sugar, and this fashionable violet dye has defied the persecutions of the Pure Drug Law. The enormous sales, due almost exclusively to the outside of this pill—"

"Yes, yes, old fellow, but the selling quality is on the inside," cried Nettleton, taking the order sheet from Applegate, just as he was affixing his signature, and waving Johns aside. "Here we are! Account of sales for year ending November 30, 1912, 143,000 gross—now counting fifty pills to the box—"

"Fifty-one!" interrupted Johns suavely.

"Fifty!" continued Nettleton, not quite

so suavely. "As I was saying—counting fifty pills to the box, we have for the pill that I have offered to the East and S—"

*"You have!"* jeered Johns.

"Yes, I," retorted Nettleton sharply. "Mr. Applegate is interested in the ingredients of my pill."

"And Mr. Applegate as a business man and druggist knows perfectly well that the success of any patent medicine depends first on its advertising and next upon its pleasing taste or form," cried Johns in rising indignation.

Krome's face had screwed into a mask of alarm. Sally gave unmistakable signs of a gale of laughter that was very much on the way. And poor Tony Toler wondered if the fourth matrimonial bark—namely his own—was about to strand on the reefs of the uncontrollable jealousy of these two partners, the one for the other.

He decided that it would be well to remind the excited men of the fact that they had a big deal on and that it did not much matter why the pills were selling provided only they sold to the Northwestern Drug Company to the number of fifty thousand gross.

He stepped forward and spoke appealingly: "Mr. Boggs! Mr. Nettleton!"

"Tony, keep out of this!" snarled Nettleton.

"Gentlemen, I didn't come here to—" began Applegate in a placating tone.

"You keep out, too!" shouted Johns.

And Tony's face went gray. For he knew that now his partnership had gone aglimmering.

And with never a thought that he had just insulted the president of the Northwestern Drug Company, Johns returned

whole-heartedly to his favorite indoor sport, attacking his partner!

"The public doesn't give a rap for the inside of your pills," he shouted.

Applegate rose and backed away in astonishment. But the fight waged on with neither let nor stay.

"Every reputable doctor approves of my pill," clamored Nettleton.

"Huh! What reputable doctor would ever prescribe your pill?" shouted his partner.

"Pooh! Do doctors prescribe your purple coloring?"

"They do! They are even giving X-ray violet baths!" retorted Johns in triumph.

Nettleton turned away in disgust and Applegate appealed to Tony. "What are they—humorists or just plain bugs?"

Nettleton had an access of sanity. "If Mr. Applegate will come with me into my private office—" he began ingratiatingly, and then could not refrain from adding, "Johns, you are talking like a fool!"

"No, Mr. Nettleton, I don't believe I care to," said Applegate.

From the table in front of him Johns gathered up a great handful of the beautiful purple boxes and held them out to plead their own cause as good sellers.

"No, Mr. Johns, your sugar coating doesn't appeal to me, either. What my firm wants is a pill that will give the human stomach a good, square, honest deal. And in this office, the cause of indigestion seems rather stronger than the cure." And taking up the order he had just signed, Mr. Applegate tore it across and started for the door.

"But, Mr. Applegate!" pleaded Tony.

Applegate handed him the torn order. "Frame it for future reference."

In still fury Tony eyed the token of defeat for his plans. Then he spoke. And there was almost a hint of tears in his voice:

"Say, you two fools! You don't need a salesman; you want a wet nurse!"

And throwing the fragments of the lost order at them, Tony made his way to the door. But there, Nettleton arrested his progress for a moment. "Get out of here! You're fired!" he shouted.

"Fired! Huh!" snarled Tony.

"Now you've done it! Lost the best salesman in America and killed the biggest order we nearly ever had!" snorted Johns.

But Sally Parker wondered if they had not done more than that to her dream

of love—and Taxis—and Tony Toler!

Nettleton shouted back across the sea of misunderstanding that was separating him further and further from his partner: "I didn't kill the order. You did it yourself when you tried to hog the credit for my pill!"

"It isn't so. I had him first and had him going," mourned Johns.

"And now you've got him gone."

"And why? Because you butt in and queer the sale when I have the order signed."

"Heh! Then I'm glad you lost it!"

"And you are perfectly willing to smash the business, George Nettleton, and choke the profits of the firm on account of your piggish jealousy! It's not fair to me—or my children!"

In great contempt, Nettleton replied: "Your children! You sop-headed nin-

compoop, you're not even married!"

"No, but I expect to be! I'm looking to the future. And when I think of those poor little things—crying for food—starving for food—on your account it makes me wild!"

For a moment Nettleton stared at his partner as if he thought he had taken leave of his senses. Then he thought of his own childless lot and a glint of anger came to his eyes. "See here, Mr. Brains and Blood," he shouted, striding toward him angrily. "That's just about enough! Another remark or two like that and we'll make the matter personal!"

"All right, Mr. Bones and Fat, I'm with you!"

"*With* me! As soon as my lawyer comes and I get *rid* of you—I'm going to sit down—and laugh!" sneered Nettleton.

"And when my lawyer comes and I get

rid of you—I'm going to set off fireworks!"

"Nut!" scoffed Nettleton.

"Mut!" retorted Johns.

"Tut tut!" chorused both.

And like two silly boys who take an immense amount of joy in the names they can invent to call each other these two grown men slammed their office doors and went to sulk, each like an Achilles in his tent.

Krome rushed to the water cooler and laved his heated brow.

"Say, Charley, if I want to keep this job I'll have to lead a double life!" philosophized Miss Parker aloud after a deal of silent reflection.

## CHAPTER IV

### IN WHICH A LAWYER ENTERS—AND REMAINS

THE door opened to admit Mr. Thomas J. Vanderholt, a slim and dapper gentleman in immaculate gray tweed, that just matched his silvering hair.

"Good morning," he said affably. "What's the matter? Same old fight?"

"Yes, but this time it's to a finish," said Krome, shaking his head sadly.

"Um! Bad as that, eh?" said Thomas J. Vanderholt. But he smiled when he said it.

Thomas J. Vanderholt was not disturbed at the thought of dissension in the camp of the partners in the Eureka firm. As a matter of fact this rather accorded

with a little scheme of his own. Any friendship he had once felt for the members of the concern had given way to a sneering disrespect for these men who were not clever enough to push a good thing when they had it, and to sink all personal animosity in a united striving for the success they could win together.

Another lawyer had once called Vanderholt "as slick a piece of goods as his own silver varnished head!" That description fitted to a nicety. Vanderholt was a suave gentleman whose quick brain and gift of oratory had generally won for him whatever he desired. But just now he desired Miss Florence Cole, of Albany, and the good-natured bulk of one T. Boggs Johns stood in his way.

The only large thing about Vanderholt was his mouth. Many men with large,



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generous mouths are by no means equally large and generous in nature. The lips of Thomas J. were formed for oratory, not liberality. In just this one respect did his appearance belie his nature. Every other feature of the lawyer's alertly poised little body and keen face bespoke his sharp nature. Only his generous mouth suggested a trustworthy simplicity that events would show plainly he did not possess.

"They want you to dissolve their partnership and let this fine, big, money-making business go to smash," returned the frightened Krome.

"And we don't want to lose our positions. They're dandy men to work for when they aren't wondering if you are on the jump to take orders from one quicker'n the other," added Sally.

Vanderholt smiled. He was thinking that a pretty girl like Sally Parker could get another position quick enough.

"Don't worry about that. Just have them out and we will settle this thing for good and all."

"But you won't, sir!" protested Krome.

"Indeed you won't!" appended Sally.

The lawyer checked them with a lordly air that just failed of real effect because they both knew that he wore very high heels to bring his height up to its maximum of five feet six.

Krome shook his head sadly. "It's gone too far! You can't smooth over what happened this time. Or if you do, you've got to give them something with a real punch behind it!"

"All right, I will! Now, get them out!" commanded Vanderholt. "And then leave the case to me." He seasoned

his command by a curt nod for Krome and a bland smile for Sally, and then tipped back on his heels to await the result of the twin summonses on the two ground-glass doors.

"Hello, boys! How are you?" he said blandly a moment later.

Nettleton advanced brusquely. "I'm the one who sent for you!"

Equally belligerent was the greeting of Johns: "And so am I!"

Then in chorus they cried, while each one pulled at an arm: "Come into my office, will you?"

"Hold on! Hold on!" shouted their legal adviser, well nigh torn between them as the two tugged at his arms. "This is one of the times when I'll have to take you both together!"

Still the opposing forces tugged and poor Vanderholt found himself swept

from side to side of the office as the tide ebbed and surged from Nettleton to Johns. It was a most undignified position for the majesty of the law to find itself in, particularly in the presence of a laughing stenographer, who was well dowered with youth and beauty.

"Come on—come on. Sit down!" cried Vanderholt in staccato crescendo.

The two men jerked out chairs and sank into them. Vanderholt made a rostrum back of the table and prepared to harangue his public. Sally advanced with a twinkle in her eyes, and with a cough and a handkerchief called into requisition to mask the smile on her lips.

"What is it, Miss Parker?" said the arbiter of the fate of the Eureka Company.

"Excuse me," choked Sally, "but would you like me to go—out—for a wh-while?"

"Yes, please," replied Johns.

"No!" thundered Nettleton, disagreeing as a matter of course. "I want her for my witness."

Johns rose in protest.

"Not a bad idea. I—we may need her," said Vanderholt. "Take a seat, Miss Parker," he concluded, in the particular variety of tone he saved for a pretty woman who was working for her living.

"All right! If he has a witness, then, so do I," said Johns. "Kromie, stay right where you are, I want you for my witness."

"Well, boys—what's the row this time?" asked Vanderholt patronizingly.

"I want you to dissolve this partnership —at once!" blustered Nettleton.

"And no patching up this trip—I want it ripped wide open," rapped out Johns.

Vanderholt looked from one to the other

in half pity. Through his alert brain flashed all the things he might have said. He might have delivered a little oration like this: "What's the matter with you two? You have every reason on earth to pull together. Are you going to let this valuable business go to ruin simply because of your own pigheaded jealousy? What you boys need in this business is team work! That's the way to win out. But if, instead of pulling together, you fight, you are doing no less than to commit a cold-blooded business suicide and pay me for arranging the funeral decorations! Don't do it, boys. Quit your squabbling and fighting and nursing childish grievances. What's it all about anyway? Down at the bottom you're friends."

But did Thomas J. Vanderholt say this? Not he!

"Well, boys, this is business and we'll cut the friendship out," said the light of the legal profession. "I'm fond of you both—you know that. Old George has been a sort of running mate of mine for years. And I— Well, we've both got the good taste to admire the same girl."

Vanderholt smiled at Johns with some undercurrent of feeling that big, honest, simple fellow did not quite understand.

"Do I understand that you fellows are fully decided to dissolve this partnership?"

"Ab-so-lute-ly!" rose the chorus in reply.

"All right. We'll do it. Question is, how will we do it?"

"That's what we're paying you for," suggested Johns.

"And heaven knows I'm earning my fee! Now, then! The simplest and

most amicable process is for one of you to buy the other out."

"Now you're talking!" broke in Nettleton.

"For the first time since you started," appended Johns.

"Good! I'm glad you agree on something. Question second—Which one of you will sell? How about you, George?"

"Me sell out to that—fathead? Never! And how long do you think the business would last with that Napoleon of Finance at the head of it?"

Johns rose in the cumulative, majestic, Jove-like anger of the slowly aroused big man. Nettleton fairly catapulted up and the two men glared at each other across the barrier of the table like Tabby and Fido over the back fence.

"Here, here! Sit down—both of you!

I'll referee this battle. Mr. Nettleton refused to sell; well and good. How about you?" asked Vanderholt.

"Who—me? Sell out the result of my brains to that hard-shelled crab there? Not T. B. J.! Nixie on that!"

Vanderholt stretched out one hand to prevent Nettleton from rising again to this occasion.

"I construe that as another refusal. Now! Since a simple bill of sale is out of the question, we'll turn to the next amicable process. You two will divide the business, each taking equal share of live customers, stock of pills on hand and good will of the company. You can then be rivals and cut each other's throats at your own pleasure and convenience!"

"Fine! I like that!" agreed Nettleton amicably.

"So do I! It's great!" grinned the equally bloodthirsty Johns.

"Oh! now we are getting somewhere. Next question: Which of you is to retain the name of the present concern?"

"Naturally, I will—" began Nettleton.

"What, and get the advantage of all our advertising! Not much you don't!" shouted Johns.

"Why not? Didn't I originate the business—and build it up to what it is? And now I'm to hand it to you! Say, Van, tell that wall-eyed pike to get back into the water where he belongs!"

"You built up the business—George Nettleton! Ha! Ha! A fine business it was when I came along with first aid to the injured stomach of the U. S. A. All you had was a pill that wouldn't sell!"

"And just because you've come along

with a measly five hundred dollars and a hideous purple coating, you think you've done it all," sneered Nettleton.

They had both forgotten the Solon who stood ready to administer their affairs.

"I have!" thundered Johns.

"You haven't! And I'll prove it. I am the man who *made* the pills!"

"And I am the man who made the public *swallow* them!"

Sally began to laugh wildly. To cover her mirth she began to cough equally wildly.

"Miss Parker, leave the room!" commanded Nettleton sternly.

"Miss Parker, do nothing of the kind!" ordered Johns.

"Will you two sit down?" thundered Vanderholt.

"I won't sit down!" declared Johns.

"And I won't!" glared his partner. "I want you to put that two hundred pound baby maniac out of my office before he wrecks it!"

"And I want you to get that chattering monkey out of mine!"

"Ah—h—h—h—h!" chattered Nettleton obligingly fitting himself to the title.

Vanderholt choked in disgust. He fairly hated these two young fools who had evolved a success that even his astute brain could not hope to duplicate in the legitimate pursuit of the law, and who hadn't sense enough to hang on to it. The public was fairly gaping to swallow their pills, but they wanted only to eat each other up. In the name of silly vanity how could such a feud start and grow and flourish, thought the maddened Thomas J.

"Stop it! *Stop it,* you nincompoops," he shouted.

They brushed this insult off as if it were a fly, and then flew at each other again.

Nettleton pointed a shaking forefinger at Johns. "I'd give anything on earth to have that big, wabbling jellyfish in the only place he's fit for or ever will be—menial—a footman—a watchdog—something that doesn't require brains or judgment. He can bark or yelp—that's all!"

"And that little spider! He can spin a web that won't hold. That's his limit!" retorted Johns.

"Worm!"

"Spider!"

"Pah! how I despise you!" choked Nettleton. "I've measured your ability. You ought to be my valet and lay out my

pajamas!" He was fairly dancing with rage as he spat it out.

Johns' face purpled. His wrath was ponderous—and thoroughly sincere.

"I've got your number, all right, you little pet cockatoo. My 'partner'—pooh! Pooh-pooh! I'd like to have you in your place—a servant to *black my boots* and jump when you hear your 'master's voice'!"

"I'm much more likely to black your eyes, you overfed, wall-eyed pike, you!"

"Try it! And I'll valet you. I'll lay you out—instead of your pajamas!"

Vanderholt watched them in lofty scorn, followed by malicious amusement. Suddenly a calculating gleam came into his eyes. He advanced upon the antagonists.

"Will—you—two—infernal idiots—shut up!"

Promptly the combatants turned on the peacemaker.

"Keep out of this, Van," they chorused, agreeing not to have their disagreeing broken in upon.

"I won't keep out! You are here to settle a business proposition and all you can do is to call names and throw a baby bluff!"

"Who? Me!" reproached Nettleton.

"No, both of you! All this rot about valets and servants and blacking boots just makes me sick. That's all!"

"Then why don't you settle things and make 'em well?" taunted Johns.

Vanderholt turned on him in a flash of honest dislike, and then calmed down to his usual impressive smoothness of manner.

"I would if you two were sports enough to put it through," he said lightly.

"I'd put through anything," Johns put the words through his teeth.

"So would I," growled Nettleton.

"You would? Then come over here and sit down!"

Vanderholt suddenly took charge of the situation, which he had not tried to guide until it suited his purpose. Now that he was positive that the wind was blowing steadily out to sea and not shifting in fitful gusts, he could set sail. Johns and Nettleton tumbled into chairs at opposite ends of the big office table. Their judge took his place exactly between them. Sally Parker reflected to herself that old Thomas J. looked "too darn smooth, and she was glad he wasn't refereein' a match with Tony Toler in it!"

"Now, then—you won't have law or

reason or common sense—suppose I give you something you can understand," said Vanderholt, as one inspired. "I deal you each a hand of poker—cold. The man who wins will run this business for a year; the man who loses will be the other's servant for a year. You suggested it with your chatter about valets and blacking boots. I call your bluff. It's the only way out—are you game?"

The belligerents stared past him and measured each other mutely. Vanderholt sneered a bit as he looked from one to the other.

"What are you trying to do—kid us?" questioned Nettleton, in disgust.

"You're a h——l of a lawyer!" blurted out Johns.

"You boys have handed me a h——l of a proposition, and even when I give you a

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sporting chance you turn it down because neither of you has the grit to stand the gaff."

"If you mean that for me, Van, I have as much grit as you have any day, and you know it!" retorted Nettleton.

"And I have more than both of you," said Johns, ponderously.

Nettleton turned on him sharply. "You! Ha, ha! You poor moon face! You wouldn't bark at a sick canary for fear he'd say 'cheep'!"

"Wouldn't, eh, George Nettleton? How about you? When Van made his fool proposal you were so afraid I'd take him up I thought you'd faint like a little lady!"

"And if I had taken it up, you big dray horse, you'd have died—standing up in your traces!"

"Would I? Well, you worm, I'll bet

you a thousand dollars that you'd be the first to crawl."

"Prove it!" snarled Nettleton.

"I will. I'm game for Van's little hand of poker just for the satisfaction of seeing you duck. Take me?"

"Aw bluff—bluff. Your usual game, T."

"Then call it," cried T., sharply. And in the face of his partner's incredulous sneer he repeated: "If I'm bluffing, *call my bluff.*"

"All right, I will," replied Nettleton. But there was desperate uneasiness in his tone.

Vanderholt clinched matters quickly. "You're on—both of you! Miss Parker, get your book. I'll put this down in contract form and have no comeback!"

Nettleton and Johns looked at him mutely. There was confident amusement

"Wheugh! Miss Parker, strike that out! Take this: *This agreement, made and entered into this blank day of June by and between the parties who have hereto set their hands and seals, witnesseth: Paragraph, Whereas, the parties hereto have found it impossible to continue as business partners, they hereby agree and do agree as follows: Paragraph: To play one hand of showdown in a game which for future legal reference may be known as poker—and the loser in said game, for the term of one year from date hereof, shall become the household servant of winner of said game; the winner hereinafter to be known as the master, and the loser, hereinafter to be known as the man, subject to the following conditions, to wit:—*"

Turning in his nervous pacing, Van faced his victims: "All right, boys?"

Johns grinned with the joyous assur-

ance of a sure winner. This was his lucky day—and he knew it "Fine!" he acceded, looking derisively at Nettleton.

That gentleman was sunk in deep and utter dejection low in his chair, and he was nervously mopping a damp and clammy brow. "Yes—that's—splendid!" he jerked out.

Johns boomed forth a jeering laugh.

"Good!" snapped Vanderholt in his best legal manner. Then he continued his dictation to Sally:

*"Clause One—And the Master shall have full and absolute control of all matters pertaining to the Eureka Digestive Pill Company; without stay, let, hindrance or process of injunction on the part of the Man."*

Whereupon both partners rose with automatic precision and as one, to register deep and abiding protest. Vanderholt

smiled paternally and held out his hands to quiet them.

"But—*the Master shall credit the Man's account with all income, commissions or other moneys rightfully his—*"

Whereupon, with automatic unity quite equalling that with which they had arisen, Nettleton and Johns sank down again in great and evident relief, and Van continued:

—"*And shall hold same, subject to deductions for bad behavior!*"

"Say, Van—what kind of bad behavior?" jerked out Nettleton in abject terror.

"I'm coming to that. *Clause Two—And the man shall immediately enter the service of the master, as his servant, valet or in such other capacity as may seem good and agreeable to the said master's wishes or desires.*"

Johns grinned again—a large placid smile as of one who visions things and likes what he sees. Nettleton looked like a man struggling in the throes of a very bad nightmare! And still the dictator went on:

*"And furthermore, the man shall serve the master with energy, diligence, respect and in all other acts of strict obedience as are generally accepted with the duties of a menial."*

Johns began to laugh. Then he fairly rolled about in his chair shouting with mirth. He mopped his brow. So did Nettleton. But their emotions were entirely dissimilar!

"Excuse me, Van—I can't help it!" shouted the mirthful one. "You know I'm to be married in October, and I'm thinking how great it would be to start housekeeping with Nettleton as our butler!

Ha! ha!" He fairly choked with gurgling merriment. "It's too good! Anything we want done—we'll let George do it!"

Nettleton grabbed up a letter-press that lay before him—but the lawyer stopped him. And on Thomas J. Vanderholt's face there was a neat little smile that just matched the little devil's curl above his forehead.

"Here, you! No assault and battery! Hand over that weapon, George! Last line, Miss Parker—

*"In all other acts of strict obedience as are generally accepted with the duties of a menial,"* read Miss Parker, with parrot-like precision. Vanderholt took up the thread of his discourse.

*"But, for each and every violation of such acts, the master may charge the man's account in the sum of one hundred dollars' forfeit."*




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Johns chuckled and rubbed his itching palms expectantly. Nettleton felt his wilting collar and mopped his neck with his handkerchief.

The voice went on: *"It is understood and agreed, however, that the master shall pay the man, in addition to his board and lodging, the sum of twenty dollars per month in wages."*

"Oh, see here, Van, that's rather small, isn't it?" protested Nettleton weakly.

Johns broke in magnanimously, quite as if the whole affair was a foregone conclusion. "Oh, all right, I'll make it thirty!"

Vanderholt took his turn at grinning. Then he issued an order to his secretary:

"Change it to thirty. *Clause Three: The other party to whom the conditions of this agreement may be made known is Mrs. George B. Nettleton."*

"And where does Mrs. Nettleton come in?" demanded Johns.

"In either case she's got to know whether George is your servant or you his. What's the matter with you?"

"Oh! Then you've got to put in another clause to hold down George B. Nettleton."

"I'm going to! Take this, Miss Parker: *It is understood and agreed, however, that should either of the parties hereto, or the wife of one of the parties hereto, make known the nature of the agreement to any other person, the offending party shall pay over to the aggrieved party the sum of five thousand dollars—cash.*"

Nettleton jumped to his feet. "No, that isn't fair! That makes me responsible for ten thousand to his five!"

"Not unless you and your wife both tell, what's the matter with you?" snapped Johns.

"That's right, George. Keep quiet," directed Vanderholt, with a calmly superior glance that twinkled strangely over the head of unsuspecting Johns. "Go on, Miss Parker.

*"Clause Four: This agreement may at any time be annulled and cancelled, but only by mutual consent. And should either party fail to faithfully fulfill the covenants herein contained, then such party shall forfeit to the other party all his stock and other interests in the Eureka Digestive Pill Company."*

Johns whistled a merry tune at this juncture, but the only vent for Nettleton's feelings seemed to be to continue to mop his neck.

*"Clause Five,"* went on the inexorable voice of Thomas J. Vanderholt, *"Mr. Thomas J. Vanderholt is hereby appointed as referee, with power to decide all questions of dispute; and shall charge therefor such fee or fees as may, in his judgment, seem just and lawful."*

"General Villa!" ejaculated Johns fervently.

Vanderholt turned away from his titular honor to continue issuing orders to Sally Parker. "That's all. Three copies, please. And if you or Krome ever mention this agreement to anyone, you will lose your jobs! Now, boys—are you both entirely satisfied?"

"I am," declared Johns. And, indeed, the expression of delight on his face looked to poor, frightened Nettleton like a grin of fiendish amusement.

"And agree to sign it—before witnesses

and under oath?" persisted the self-appointed referee, watching Johns with a bit of a cat-and-mouse expression.

"Sure, I do! But look at him!" And Johns pointed in great glee to the dejected-looking heap that sat slumped in his chair across the room.

"Well, George—how about it?" queried Vanderholt, briskly.

Nettleton found the courage to rise and protest. "I—I won't do it—I'm married!"

Johns jumped up with a hearty laugh of genuinely care-free amusement. "Ha, ha, ha, ha! Now isn't that the limit? Oh, you crawling worm! You're 'married!' Well, who is playing this game of poker—you or she?"

"It isn't a square deal! Oh, not on my account! but I've got to consider Mrs. Net-

tleton. It isn't a square deal to her, I say."

"It will be a square deal—to her all right!" put in Vanderholt, grimly.

Johns was fairly dancing with rage at the delay. He gloated over his triumph in advance.

"Oh, somebody warm his milk for him and give him a little kiss!" he jeered.

"Cut that out, will you?" retorted Nettleton, angrily, and then turned to appeal to the lawyer. "Why, think of her position, Van, if I lost and had to be a servant to that big, pachydermatous bluff over yonder!"

"Don't you worry, Georgie dear," replied Johns, sweetly. "I have a large nature and am perfectly willing to take on Mrs. Nettleton as a parlor maid."

Nettleton started forward, furiously. "You blackguardly cad! You—"

Johns lunged to meet his assailant and Krome and Van found themselves busily engaged for the ensuing moment or two in holding the infuriated men apart.

Sally again had recourse to her handkerchief, but this time it was to hide her face from a woman's mortal dread and secret delight—masculine fisticuffs!

"Here, you!" shouted Vanderholt doughtily for all his bantam proportions, "No rough house—or I'll whip the pair of you—'Johns'—'White Hope!' You've got my proposition. Now take it or leave it!"

Johns swallowed the line—hook, bait and sinker exactly as Vanderholt had foreseen.

"Oh, he'll leave it, all right, all right,"

he sneered tauntingly. "I knew he'd crawl, but I didn't think he'd duck behind a petticoat!"

Nettleton broke in furiously. "That's a lie. And I'll show you two! Here! Who's got a pack of cards?"

"I have," admitted Krome, delighted at taking a speaking part in the drama, "I play solitaire with them on the New Rochelle express."

"Thanks! We'll deal them quick or they'll both quit," said Vanderholt, seizing the pack and shuffling in smiling anticipation of the consummation of his little coup d'état.

"Come in, boys, take your medicine. Here, Krome, you are honest and impartial. Cut!"

## CHAPTER V

### IN WHICH THE LAWYER DEALS THE CARDS

Was ever poker in such humor played? Was ever poker in such humor won?

Sally edged up to the table, looking on eagerly. The two partners scowled at each other and took their seats at opposite and opposing ends of the long table. Krome cut the cards and Vanderholt picked them up.

"Well, well; what are you waiting for? Deal 'em—hurry up!" cried Nettleton, impatient to have the agony over and know the worst once and for all.

"Ha, ha!" chortled Johns. "Getting nervous! Got him beat to start."

"All right, boys, here goes!" laughed Vanderholt. "Senior partner first. Net-

tleton—Johns. So, now—'skin' your hands."

"Get your foot off my chair!" snarled Johns at the over-eager Krome, who was fairly projecting himself into the game.

"Well, George, how many cards?" queried Vanderholt.

Nettleton swallowed hard, looked nervously at the tantalizing smile on Johns' bland face, and then braced himself to make his discard. He wet his lips again and again before his voice would creep out to reply: "Three."

"All right. Put down your pair or whatever it is," commanded Referee Vanderholt.

Nettleton held his cherished two cards close to a palpitating breast and looked beseechingly at Johns.

"What are you? Pat?" asked his sepulchral voice.

"Never mind that! Put down your hand," blustered Johns, beginning to lay down his own discard.

Nettleton laid the cards he was retaining on the table.

"Pair of sixes!" said Krome in slow scorn.

Johns laughed boisterously, and Nettleton sank back in his chair utterly discouraged.

"Well, I— What have you?" asked the dealer.

"I'm holding one card—my lucky queen of hearts—and three more ladies in the pack. Here's the little beauty. Deal!"

"Hold on—George first," amended Vanderholt.

As he dealt the cards to Nettleton's pair, Krome read them off in a tone that showed how negligible he considered such cards: "Nine—three—eight."

"Still a pair of sixes!" chronicled Vanderholt.

Johns laughed again, and Nettleton sank and shrank still lower in his chair.

"Oh, what a cinch to beat!" exulted Johns. "Here, you little dealer-man, gimme four! Just flip 'em out, old pal. I'm going to eat that butler up!"

"Look out, T., the game's young yet!" cautioned Thomas J., and he dealt out one card at a time, slowly and impressively. Again Krome read them off:

"King—"

"Of hearts," exulted Johns. "Come on you king or queen!"

"Jack," read Krome, as the dealer laid it down.

And still the chant went on. Johns rose in his excitement now.

"Of hearts! Come on you jack or queen!"

"Ace."

"Of hearts! Come on you little straight or flush. Come on! Come!!"

As the last card was dealt Krome read it off in an awed whisper. So much responsibility lay in the flip of that last little bit of pasteboard.

"Four!" he muttered.

And then Sally Parker gasped: *"Of Spades!"*

"Nothing," said Vanderholt to the defeated man in a tone that suggested that the triumph was his, too. *"Good Boy, George!"* he added, turning to the other partner with a very different manner.

Johns stared at the cards and then sank slowly into his seat. He had been so sure this was his lucky day! Only an hour ago Florence had kissed him and gone tripping out with his ring on her finger. And the queen he had drawn had been

Queen of Hearts—a little "red head" like his own queen of hearts. Why, you couldn't beat that for luck. But he had been beaten by a miserable, paltry, scurvy "pair of sixes!" And now Johns slid as low as possible in the depths of his chair and of despair—a dejected heap of once wholesome, healthy, jolly, good-looking humanity—changed by the flip of a card from a "human dynamo" to a—lump of clay—a butler!

Nettleton failed for an instant to sense his victory. He ignored Vanderholt's outstretched hand and passed his own across his damp forehead as he rose slowly and in a manner of extreme tiredness.

"My God! I win!" he ejaculated suddenly.

A triumphant smile began to overspread his features. He adjusted his coat and straightened himself suddenly.

"Boggs! Attend me!" he jerked out, but tentatively, as if it were all a cobweb a word might blow away. Nothing happened! Johns sat slumped into his chair as his whilom partner had done but a minute before. But there were no partners present now—only Master and Man!

The master spoke again with curt incisiveness and much keen enjoyment.

"Boggs! as my butler, the first little service I shall require of you—is to grow side whiskers."

"Boggs"—the erstwhile T. Boggs Johns, equal partner in the Eureka Digestive Pill Company straightened his shoulders with a quick jerk, and studied his "master's" triumphant face for a moment.

Then he reached for his "lucky queen of hearts" and tore her slowly in two.

And Thomas J. Vanderholt went out to keep his luncheon engagement with pretty Florence Cole of Albany.

## CHAPTER VI

### IN WHICH MR. JOHNS LEARNS HOW QUICKLY SIDE-WHISKERS AND LOVE MAY GROW

BEING a "good sport" is a sort of fetish with the average man. It may mean all sorts of impossible situations where pride and decency and the rights of dependents are interfered with. But the "average man" pays his bets or bears the scorn of his kind.

There was once an election bet that merely specified that the loser was to conduct himself for twelve hours as the winner dictated. The winner thought he had a sense of humor, so he ordered the loser to don a ballet costume and go stand at a certain quiet corner (far removed from the notice of the police) and propose to

every woman that passed. That bet netted the loser twenty-four hours in jail, a broken engagement, a breach of promise suit and pneumonia. But he had been a "good sport" and paid up, and as he got off with his life and part of his fortune, and probably would never have been happy with his fiancée if she had married him, he felt that he had very little cause for complaint. As for the winner, no one thought of cutting him dead for the trouble he had caused or of drumming him out of his several clubs.

It never occurred to T. Boggs Johns to try to break the contract into which he had entered in the presence of witnesses. Equally, of course, it never occurred to his partner to let him off!

George Nettleton had a very heavy score to settle with the man whom he had admitted to partnership with a feeling that

the purple covering might make his pills, but it must ever be acknowledged that he had "made" the maker of the purple coloring. Johns had not only neglected to be grateful every hour of the day and night to the partner who had elevated him to the rank of "captain of industry," but he had a pet expression with which to belittle the partner who seemed to his "upstart" soul to be neither superior nor equal, but inferior! "Oh, somebody warm his milk and give him a little kiss."

And as George B. Nettleton remembered how often that remark had nettled him, he planned that his revenge should follow the words of the old ballad: "Revenge is just, revenge is sweet; and mine, Loch by, shall be complete!"

Nettleton had been the conservative element of the firm. He had feared to take chances in business policy with the same

timorous dread of risk that would have led him to refuse the gambling chance of that game of poker if he had dared invite the ridicule of Van and Johns by declining to play the game.

The game had been forced upon him. He suffered tortures waiting for the cards to fall. He had thought of the wild and comprehensive attack of hysterics with which Nellie would greet him if he came home to her with the announcement that he was going to give up the manufacture of pills for a year and take to "buttling" to a *Pill!* Now chance had dealt him a winning hand—a pair of sixes forsooth. Well—let the loser beware!

And Johns had a neat little, sweet little feeling of premonition as to what was coming to him. If that premonition had been sweeping and comprehensive—if he could have guessed half, what would he have

done? Why he would have paid up. Gentlemen do pay, you know! Debts of honor, contracts, being on the level, not "acting like a quitter" and all the catch words of the letter of the law would have held T. Boggs Johns even if he had been the seventh son of a seventh son and a soothsayer to wit.

Some men are born servants, some acquire servants and some have service thrust upon them. Of such was T. Boggs Johns.

His first pleasant little endurance test was being led to the slaughter and suffering the superiority of a servant's outfitter while he was measured for a livery. The fact that Van and George had a serious discussion as to the possible advisability of maroon or bottle green or navy blue and knee breeches and powdered hair did not add to his calmness of feeling.

"How's his calf, Mr. Jorkins? Do you think his legs are good enough for breeches?" asked George in all solemnity.

Van giggled and Johns wriggled.

Mr. Jorkins gave the matter his serious attention. "How many man-servants do you keep, Mr. Nettleton?"

"Just the one," replied Nettleton.

Johns found temporary joy in the scorn of the outfitter.

"Well, Mr. Nettleton, since you have only the one man, of course you want him in the regulation black clothes. It is only in establishments where there are at least two footmen in addition to the butler that it is correct to have anything so pretentious as breeches and powdered wigs and color in the livery. In simple little homes, black is best."

The very recent butler snickered. He was duly admonished. But he reflected

that it was rather decent to see that bounder of a tailor taking George down a peg or two! And then came the added thought that a sure-enough butler would have been covered with shame at the thought of belonging to such an humble household. There is surely pride in all professions.

The first of the liveries was turned out in twenty-four hours. In the meantime the breaking in of the new servant began after the ideas of the inexperienced Mr. Nettleton. Having the upper hand of that "mush-faced captain of industry" Johns, was such a constant joy that his whilom partner found himself longing for the days of Simon Legree or the good old cat-o'-nine-tails of pirate lore. However, tongue lashings were quite in the order of the day. And they were no more moderate and tenderly applied because

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Nellie Nettleton had promptly gone into hysterics on hearing of the addition to her household.

"Men are cra-a-a-zy!" she shrieked. "No woman would ever have signed such a contract—nor have kept it if she had."

"Well, you don't expect me generously to break it and dispense at once with the services of a butler and my half interest in the Eureka Digestive Pill Company, do you, Nellie?" asked her spouse in wide scorn at the brazen lack of honor of which women fairly boasted.

"I don't know what to expect. Oh, George-e-e-e-e-e, how can I bear having T. around the house. He is so big I'll just stumble over him. I don't think it's fair to make me stand it."

"Good little Nellie—you don't admire big men, do you?" said George, smiling, as



"DON'T GO IN THERE, MR. BOGGS 'E'LL BASH YOU ON THE 'EAD SIR"

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he straightened up to every inch of his five feet eight.

"I don't know," wailed Nellie. "I don't know what kind of man I like. But this is not fair to T. or to me at all. Oh, George, let him off—for my sake—let him off."

At the moment George was quite delighted at the thought that his wife had not wanted T. around the house. It did not occur to him that Nellie was wasting much sweet feminine sympathy on that gentleman. Women liked winners and had a deep scorn for unsuccessful men. He fairly gloated in the thought of how Johns must daily endure the sweet toleration and cool superiority in Nellie's eyes. But even the prophets of old scarcely ventured to foretell what a woman will do under given circumstances. And the

present circumstances were scarcely of the give and take for granted sort!

And it was written in the book of fate that while one T. Boggs Johns cultivated his entirely unsuspected abilities at learning to "buttle," a number of other folk should cultivate a number of other equally unsuspected abilities to feel and think some brand new feelings and thoughts.

While George and Van smiled and grew expansive about slapping one another on the back and calling one another "old top" and "good old chap," Nellie fought her desire to apologize and faint and grow hysterical every time "Boggs" and his shiny brass buttons came within her line of vision. And "Boggs" tried to remember the fourth floor back hall bedroom in which he had slept in his olden days as a soda clerk as he made his way nightly to the "servants' quarters." But

fond memory insisted on turning to his luxurious chambers on East Sixtieth street every time he turned and tossed on the hard little cot that protested nightly against upholding two hundred and ten pounds of militant manhood!

And there were two other ladies in the story, but in the words of the romance, "to those we shall come anon."

In the two weeks that followed, T. Boggs Johns had ample time to readjust his whole viewpoint of life. Those fourteen days served to create outgrowing sidewhiskers such as his master demanded, and an ingrowing grouch such as the situation demanded.

Nellie Nettleton continued to protest wildly at the absurdity of having in her house as butler her husband's erstwhile partner and the friend who had been served so often at her table by the neat-

clad maid whom she declared to be sufficiently elegant for the Nettleton establishment. But no mere feminine protest ever outlasted a lordly masculine dissertation on "debts of honor." So while Johns looked ever more hopeful as Nellie orated hysterically against the situation, Thomas J. Vanderholt, representing the majesty of the law, upheld George Nettleton's desire for his "pound of flesh."

And T. Boggs Johns, Esq., late of East Sixtieth street and a choice collection of clubs, found himself paying heavily for every bit of hatred he had ever nursed in his heart for one George Nettleton.

The "side-burns" grew apace. And other things grew as rapidly. The particular mushroom growth that militated to make "Boggs' " position almost more than man could bear was a love that he had inspired in a maiden heart. *Said* maiden

heart belonged to Coddles, the English maid of all work at the Nettleton home. Coddles was one of those women who are born old maids—and also born protesting against the drab hair and general drabness of appearance that make it impossible for any masculine heart to beat responsive to her own.

She might have been fifty and coyly confessed to "twenty-nine, sir." She was of badly distributed ample proportions. She was flat of figure wherever a curve should have been, and curved below the waist line into a sad caricature of that posture which at its best looks its name—the débutante "slouch."

Her feet were as flat and large as her waist, and her wispy hair was as lusterless as her dull blue eyes. Her mouth was wide and her complexion sallow. And yet Coddles was a woman—and therefore

to be won by the first unsuspecting male creature that represented some of the health and beauty that had always been starved out of her life. She added nothing to the joyous simplicity of T. Boggs Johns' sufficiently difficult masquerade.

In two weeks T. Boggs Johns became to all intents and purpose "Boggs"—butler in the home of George Nettleton. The whiskers grew and so did Boggs's knowledge of how to mix a cocktail—which he was not to drink. And as Boggs learned to lay out smoking jacket and slippers nightly against the return of his master, and to put studs in the bosom of another man's dress shirt his melancholy grew apace. His work was scarcely congenial. Dispensing sodas at Thomaston, Connecticut, had been a bit more inspiring—and dispensing with all mail from or to Miss Florence Cole, of Albany, was scarcely in-

spiring at all. And it was muggy and hot in the city and butlers did not fish or shoot at gun clubs and rod clubs in Maine.

Finally then, there arrived an afternoon that seemed to presage the finish of T. Boggs Johns, and that ushered in the finishing touches to several things. "Boggs," to give him the name to which he now must answer, had just carried in a tray bearing a decanter and a cool-looking siphon of vichy. He set it down and then flung himself into a chair dejectedly. Two weeks of this game had been purgatory. He knew exactly what a year of it was going to suggest.

As he sat brooding with his hand over his eyes, Coddles came sweeping her way down the living room stairs. She stopped on the landing and leaned upon her broom somewhat as she pined to lean upon the broad expanse of chest that belonged to

that "fine figger of a man"—the new butler. Coddles sighed, too—but not dejectedly. Into her eyes came the look of the huntress.

"Sh-h-h! Mr. Boggs, sir," she cried with a great show of being fellow conspirators in a tender little love affair not yet ready to flower.

Johns sat up and turned disgustedly.

"Well, Coddles, what do you want?"

"Ho, come now; don't be cross with little Coddles, who's yer friend. Hi thought whilst everythink was quiet like, Hi'd just run hin and 'elp you with yer work," and the lady approached smiling with a fine show of red gums.

"Keep away, will you? Keep away," begged the distracted man defenselessly.

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir. Hi didn't mean no 'arm. But this 'ere hain't no

man's work, hany 'ow. I don't see wy the master maikes yer do hit."

"I do," said Johns firmly, picking up a dustcloth. "The precise removal of microscopic specks of dust from his personal possessions is the chief component of a butler's destiny."

"Yes, sir. Hi don't know what yer mean, sir, but hit's very likely."

Coddles was an English cockney, and whatever the master man might say or do to such a groveling feminine soul as hers was sure to be right. In her walk of life women boasted of the beatings they suffered from drunken husbands, and force stood for love. She pressed a splay-fingered hand to a palpitating heart and looked at him in love-sick adoration. Johns began to feel sick, too, but it was not love-sickness that he experienced at

the moanings of his middle-aged and altogether unattractive inamorata.

"Here, stop grinning at me that way!" he shouted nervously. "What are you sweeping for at this time of the afternoon?"

Coddles obligingly changed her expression as she backed away timorously—but it was a delicious tremor she felt at getting an order from such a king among men! "We's hexpectin' guests for dinner, sir."

"Guests! For dinner! Who?"

"The marster, sir, 'e just telephoned and arsked me to tidy hup the spare room."

Johns spoke grimly from the settee where he was sitting, industriously mopping his forehead with the dustcloth, which left a series of corrugated brown wakes where it traveled. "Guests! And a million to one they know me!"

Coddles advanced upon her prostrate hero. "Now, don't you worry, sir, about the hextra work. Hi'll 'ave the dishes 'ot and ready for you to serve 'em. . . . Ho, Mr. Boggs, sir, I don't believe you'se 'appy. . . . Men folks can 'ide their feelings in the daytime, Mr. Boggs—but not hat night!"

"What do you know about that?" shouted Johns.

"W'y, sir, Hi can 'ear you through the transept a moanin' and cursin' in yer sleep. Mr. Boggs, sir—was yer ever a married man?" And Coddles leaned forward tenderly with a meaning smile on her flat drab face.

Johns studied his tormentor grimly for a minute or two and then answered through his teeth. "Yes—three times."

"Was yer now? W'y, dearie me." And Coddles moved nearer upon the set-

tee. What a romantic, distinguished man Mr. Boggs was! Well—he had won three women—he would surely know how to woo a fourth—particularly if she gave him a bit of encouragement. Fate would have no further use for Coddles, that sad female felt sure, if she did not make the most of the opportunity furnished by the presence of Mr. Boggs under the same roof with her. She attempted with pathetic and dreadful coyness to lean on the broadcloth shoulder so temptingly near. Johns, the persecuted, read her silly simper aright and he jumped up out of the danger zone. For what if someone came in and saw that old "bag of bones and hank of hair" leering at him! Coddles collapsed in a wild sprawl across the settee. "But I'll tell you one thing, Coddles, that three is just about my limit. Understand?"

The dauntless female followed to the middle of the room, as she was prepared to follow to the end of the world. "Yes, sir. Thank you, sir—but of course we halways 'ave the privilege of changing hof hour minds. Mr. Boggs—did you ever think of the differinks between yer and—me?" She tilted her head to one side and ventured a sidewise look from under the unthatched eaves where her eyelashes should have been.

"Eh. No, I didn't. What do you mean?"

"Hin this 'ere 'ouse'old, sir, you was hengaged because yer was 'andsome—but Hi were hengaged—because Hi'm 'omely." There was no one to appreciate the pathos of her wisdom as she spoke.

As the maiden advanced the man retreated.

"Yes—what makes you think so?" he gasped, like a court of last resort.

Coddles felt that she had scored one by whetting curiosity. Now she would regale her love with a choice bit of back stairs innuendo.

"Hof course, nobody hain't never told me, plump outright, but hanyone with harf han heye can see that the missus 'as a jealous disposition. Han she ain't a goin' to 'ave no good-lookin' 'uzzies a-anging around to hattrack 'er 'usban'."

"Well, that's good logic—maybe—but where do Hi—I mean Hi—Hi mean I—I—I—come in?"

Coddles giggled appreciatively and drew a circle upon the rug with a coyly extended flat-soled "Gladstone" shoe—which she finally lifted, crane like, to rub along a shapeless length of white spotted maroon stocking. "Ho—with yer hit's

differink. A 'andsome butler his a hornamenk."

"H'm—that's what the master says I am," and the spirit of T. Boggs Johns temporarily resurgent, prompted a smile.

Coddles clasped her hands and smiled so wistfully that even the pessimistic Johns knew that the poor deluded creature was too pathetic to be considered a menace to his peace of mind. "Yes, sir. An' sometimes yer looks so mournful han' sad yer puts me hin mind of a piece of music."

Johns threw the dustcloth aside impatiently and Coddles rescued it on the fly and clasped it lovingly to her heart—since he had held it. Then in a fine frenzy she kissed it. She spoke in the nearest thing to cooing she could manage with her flat voice. "Han w'en yer's hun-appy hit's because yer's lonesome—han hif yer would

honly let me rub yer 'ead, sir—'an 'old yer 'and—"

She reached forward and touched him with timidity that increased to boldness as she actually felt her fingers come in contact with the cloth of his sleeve. As her misshapen fingers slid downward she smiled beatifically and went on to her goal —his back—Johns sprang away desperately as her moist palm touched his wrist.

"Coddles, you are sick! You need a doctor—you—"

"No, no, sir—'deed Hi don't! Hit ain't the stummick, Mr. Boggs, sir—hit's the 'eart." She still advanced as he retreated in terror and she smiled as wheedlingly as ever she could manage. "Han if your'll only learn to care a weeny little bit, sir—"

"Stop it—will you—keep away! Why, woman, you are raving crazy!

You—" and as he looked around in utter desperation Nettleton's footsteps sounded in the hall. For the first time it was welcome to Johns' ear.

Coddles looked up in dismay. "Ho, Lud—it's 'im. Mr. Boggs—sir—hif you 'appens to change your mind—Hi'm in the kitching." One last giggle and Coddles' face was mercifully removed from the horizon of Johns.

## CHAPTER VII

### IN WHICH THE "BUTLER" CELEBRATES HIS BIRTHDAY AND RECEIVES A GIFT

JOHNS came to attention as the fortnight had schooled him to do when his "Master" entered the room. Heels clicked together and palms spread out with little fingers on the seams of the trousers with regular West Point precision. Nettleton came jauntily through the door twirling a silverwood stick and clad in immaculate summer afternoon tweeds. He carried two packages which he placed carefully on the table and then he addressed the attendant "menial" haughtily.

"Boggs! My hat and stick! It is part of your duty to anticipate my wishes

without my being continually forced to call your attention to such trifling details. It is most annoying! Why don't you answer me!"

"Yes, sir." Boggs gulped it down as he deftly hid from view the menacing movement he had been making with the stick.

"Then please remember it. And get my smoking jacket."

Johns produced the garment and helped him into it in a series of jerks.

"Boggs! You missed your vocation. You should have hired out to be a piano mover!"

"I did!" said the "servant" blandly.

"No impudence. Now, Boggs, I'll have my slippers."

Johns took them from under the chair and made a motion as if to fling them into Nettleton's face. Then he knelt heavily

in front of him and began to unfasten his shoes. Nettleton leaned back luxuriously the while, ruminating some further method of torture.

"By the way—I noticed this morning —that er—shine you gave me was purely superficial. If I remember right—our contract calls for energy and diligence. Well, why don't you pull that shoe off—are you going to take all night? Ouch! What the devil are you doing?" as one wild yank parted foot and shoe.

"You told me to pull it off, didn't you?"

"I didn't tell you to pull off my foot with it! Get me a highball—and be quick about it!"

Johns poured an over-plenteous supply of whisky into a glass and added a little vichy. He drank behind Nettleton's back as that gentleman rustled the leaves

of his paper and whistled "You'll Have To Get Under" with suggestive emphasis, and then squirted vichy viciously into the dregs in his glass until it was a very dilute highball indeed that he bore seriously and with a flourish of elegance to the unsuspecting Nettleton, who was buried deep in the mysteries of "Indoor Sports"—while his butler had a little indoor sport of his own.

"Where is Mrs. Nettleton?" asked her husband, sipping slowly and reflecting that mixing a drink ought not to be beyond his whilom partner.

"Been out all afternoon calling," replied the butler, going toward the stairways shoes in hand.

Nettleton leaned back determined that Johns shouldn't suspect how little pleasure he was getting out of that drink. "Ah-h-h-h-h! I tell you, Boggs, it's great

to have a comfortable, cozy home to come to after office hours. But then as a successful business man, I think I deserve it."

Timidly Johns ventured. "I say, George—I mean Mr. Nettleton—I—er—would you tell me—or—*how is business?*"

Nettleton saw a chance for a little more bear-baiting as he replied:

"Great! Why, T., you'd hardly believe it—but since you left I've just about doubled the business. It shows what system and intelligence can do. No disturbance. No noise—except the orders coming in. For the first time in years I feel that I can do something. Oh! That reminds me—I've decided to change the color of the pills."

Johns dropped the shoes with a scattering movement of his arm and spoke as if dazed. "You are going to change the

color of my pills? Why, George, you don't mean that—you can't!"

Nettleton smiled blandly. "Haven't I a right according to the contract? It gives me full and absolute control of all matter pertaining to the business! That's clear enough—isn't it?"

Johns replied pathetically. "Yes, I know. But to change the color of my—why, George—it's like the murder—of my only—*child!*"

Nettleton grinned sarcastically. "Look here. Don't you think it's about time to stop worrying over your descendants? That was a hideous color anyway. I've decided to change it to a polka-dotted pill."

Johns had sunk into a chair, but now he rose with sudden abruptness. "A polka-dotted pill! For the Lord's sake, George—"

"No argument. I've proved that I'm right. The minute I advertised this change the business jumped."

"Jumped! It's a wonder it didn't scream."

"Oh, Boggs, I forgot to tell you, I'm expecting dinner guests this evening," said Nettleton, suddenly putting him in his place.

"Who are they?"

"What?"

"I said—who are they?" repeated Johns, advancing and speaking in a louder tone.

"Boggs, you mortify me. Please remember your position and the contract."

"I do remember them both. But there's nothing in that contract that gives you the right to put me on exhibition for my former friends!"

"There's nothing in it to the contrary.

It is not customary to consult the butler as to the list of dinner guests. Besides, you are disguised—by your side whiskers. Of course they aren't very becoming to you, but they answer their purpose admirably. You always were a bit the type of English servant—now those hirsute appendages make you into a regular butler. Remember the contract. Ah, there's the doorbell. Answer it."

"All right! But I want to say this to you and Van. That is the most one-sided contract ever written. And another thing, I—want—my—mail!"

"Your mail?" queried Nettleton, loftily.

"My private letters that come to the office. And I'm going to have them!"

"Boggs, don't irritate me with such a trivial matter. That bell is still ringing. Go see who's that at the door."

Nettleton grinned after the retreating

form and then turned to the telephone.

"Hello! 6170 Lenox. Poor old Boggsy—it is a bit rough. But 'where ye sow, there shall ye also reap.'

"Hello—is this Mr. Vanderholt's residence? Oh, hello Van! How are you? Fine. Did you find you could make it for dinner this evening? Good boy—come right over. I have a surprise for you. No, I can't tell you over the phone. *The servants are hanging around!*" For at this juncture Boggs had come into the room carrying a large bundle of laundry. "Put on your Tux and hurry. Good-by. . . . Well, Boggs, what is it?"

"Your—damned laundry," said Boggs low and distinctly. He took the package in both hands and threw it at Nettleton's head. The paper gave way and a shower of linen fell out. Nettleton sprang up



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from the telephone chair at the side of the great library table.

"Why — you impertinent — say—look here. Did you know this piece of work is going to cost you just one hundred dollars?" He took from his pocket a small book bound in crimson leather and made a note.

"Yes—I know it—but it's worth it. This is the first moment of actual enjoyment I've had since I came into this house," snickered the sorely tried "butler."

"Then I'll give you another. You may pick up the shirts. A nice way you act after all my thoughtfulness and consideration of you. And do you know what day this is?"

"No, I've lost track of days lately," replied Johns, nimbly skipping from shirt bosom to shirt bosom before he gathered

them up and slapped them in a heap on the newly removed sack-coat.

"It's the twenty-ninth of June. Your birthday."

"Ha! Ha! Many happy returns!" Johns shook his own hand enthusiastically.

"Well, here's a little present I brought you. It isn't much, but still—" And speaking in a deep voice of strange vibrations, Nettleton produced the long slender package he had carried with such care.

"A present for me? That's awfully good of you, old chap. Hanged if it isn't!"

"Why, no, I'm glad to do it. I only hope it will be a comfort to you."

"It's shaped like a floral offering," and Johns smiled a bit sentimentally as he removed the paper wrapping and disclosed —a feather duster! He gazed at it critic-

ally and then at Nettleton with equal critical faculty. "What's the idea?"

Nettleton began to unwrap the other bundle—a large flat one. "Behold—framed in silver—a pair of sixes and a torn queen. Two little sixes and a queen—a lucky queen of hearts! Ain't they cute? Now, then, I'll want you to dust this—carefully—twice a day. Understand?"

Johns groped for his self-control as Nettleton placed that little token of a fall from a lofty estate on the table. "Yes," said he.

"Sir!" snapped master.

"Sir!" gasped man.

"Very well, Boggs. We'll dine this evening—at seven. And I trust you'll do nothing to mortify me before my guests. And, Boggs, you may serve the cocktails —here."

Johns looked after him mutely. Then

he turned to the table and studied his birthday present for a moment. "It's going to cost me another hundred—*but*—" With the feather duster he struck the picture, knocking it to the floor and shattering the glass into fragments.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN WHICH THE MISTRESS PLEADS THE BUTLER'S CAUSE

Down the stairs and into the room, came Nellie Nettleton, gliding in her own particularly feminine way. She wore a fascinating frock of black taffeta, girdled in rose and a rose-colored sailor set atop of her dark hair. The effect of her milliner's and couturier's efforts—aided and amplified by her own—were quite wasted upon the morose person who stood gloating over his handiwork of wreckage.

"Oh, T.," she burst out, "I'm so sorry for all this—indeed I am—and I'm surely doing all I can to make it easier for you."

She advanced upon him smiling sweetly. Johns found himself wondering wildly

what *this* one was going to do! Nellie could not be dismissed as lightly and peremptorily as Coddles. But what was the matter with the women anyway? They were too damn sympathetic—to butlers. That is—most women. He suspected that Florence would be too amused to be sympathetic. She might even be scornful.

"Th—that is thank you, Nellie—you're a brick," he said uneasily.

"No—I'm not. But I am using all my influence with George to make him less exacting. Why T., I can't tell you how I lie awake nights and think that you who used to have our guest room and the best embroidered bed-spread are up next door to Coddles."

Johns jumped.

"That's all right, Nellie. I've got to go through with this thing. I'll go through

with it if I turn purple like the pills—only they're polka dotted now—Oh, Nellie, you might use your influence about that."

Nellie smiled coquettishly and came closer at the encouraging thought of being able to do something for her good looking and unusual butler.

Again Nettleton to the rescue. From upstairs he called: "Hello, sweetheart; that you?"

"Sweetheart" pouted a bit and evasively replied: "Yes, darling; I've just this instant come in." Then in an undertone she admonished Johns: "Don't let him see you talking to me—it might affect my influence. Sh-h-h!" For now Mrs. George Nettleton's husband was descending the stairs.

"Well, well! Here you are at last. For the last half hour I've been so worried

about you. I've been sitting at the window watching every woman that passed."

Nellie's eyes flared, and Johns, thinking of Coddles' reason for her own presence in the house, experienced a moment of actual enjoyment.

"Every pretty woman that passed," corrected Nettleton.

Mrs. Nettleton withdrew from his embrace and asked sharply, "What?"

"I—I—mean—watching for *you*. You know what I mean. Those other women—merely disappointments."

And he embraced her again—only to remove his arms and their support with disconcerting suddenness and to dash across the room to inspect the pieces of glass and the tell-tale dented picture frame that lay before him. And then out came the little red book and down went a little charge

against the account of T. Boggs Johns.

It was not a particularly propitious moment to plead his cause, but Nellie began to beg a bit of leniency in the treatment of their butler, and as her final argument in his cause she produced a telegram and read it aloud.

" 'Will arrive this afternoon, six fifteen. Love. Florence.' Don't humiliate him before the girl he wants to win. He won't be able to bear having her see him, George."

"I know all about that telegram," said the master of the establishment. "I wrote to Florence several days ago. Asked her to run down and spend a week with us. Told her you would be delighted."

"With us?" cried Nellie in consternation. "But, George, dear—we can't have her here."

"Why not? She's one of your most intimate friends. I thought you would be glad to have her."

"I would under ordinary circumstances. But don't you see—don't you *know* that T. is head over heels in love with Florence Cole?"

"Well, what of it? She's a darn pretty and fascinating girl, and she'll bring a little life and fun into the place."

"Oh—George Nettleton. So you ask my friends to visit without consulting me—because your wife bores you!"

"Nellie!" he cried, desperately. When Nellie's voice rose, George was always prepared for an attack of hysterics.

"And I won't have poor T. tortured just so you can flirt under my very nose."

"And I won't have you always considering 'poor T.'—that's no way for you to

talk about your butler. You are darned anxious to defend him. I don't like it, Nellie—I won't have it, I tell you. I invited her here so she could see T. as a butler—besides it gives Van a chance—and he is a good fellow, Van is."

"Well, you'll have to explain to Florence," said Nellie with an emphatic snap of red lips and gray eyes.

"And pay five thousand for the privilege. Not much!" smiled George.

"Very well, then. I'll explain."

"Oh, no you don't. I don't care any more to pay five thousand for you than for myself!"

"But somebody's got to tell her. If you don't and I don't—then poor T.'s just got to."

"Oh, well, that's different. T. has more reason to want to explain. Besides

Florence see me with a red nose—any more than I would have her invited if I could have helped it."

"No, don't let her see you crying. Run up to your room."

Mrs. Nettleton rose with the dignified ignoring of her own weakness that characterizes the jealous woman. "You want to get rid of me—well, I guess I'll powder my own nose in my own drawing room, if I like."

"All right, then. Stay where you are." And gritting his teeth, Nettleton went to answer the summons of the door bell, even as Johns came into the room with his most sanctimonious air of being a "Henglish" butler.

"Never mind, Boggs—I'll answer it," said his master affably.

"What! You?" and Nellie looked up from the ministrations of her powder puff

as the "butler" exclaimed in stately surprise:

"Well? Can't I answer my own door bell? What's the matter with you? Clear out! I guess I haven't always had a dub of a butler to try to give me orders."

The door slammed after Johns, and the red notebook came out again almost automatically and another hundred dollars was lost to T. Boggs Johns.

## CHAPTER IX

### IN WHICH MISS COLE AND HER LETTERS ARRIVE TOGETHER

In the next minute a radiant-looking and refreshed Nellie was embracing a little figure suited and suited to a "t" in a soft green faille suit, and was declaring to that very guest over whom she had recently debated: "I'm so glad you've come! I've just been longing for you from the minute I asked dear old George to write to you."

Sic semper femina! But Nettleton looked a bit at this latest piece of feminine duplicity.

"How well you're looking. And how well dear old George is looking," said

Florence of the red locks and sharpened perceptions. "Shall I kiss him, too?"

"What? Why, certainly—if you like —kissing other women's husbands."

"There—now I feel at home," beamed Florence cherubically, plumping into a big chair that fairly swallowed her. Her comfort increased in direct ratio to Nellie's discomfort.

"Yes? Ha, ha!" was her hostess's mirthless reply. "So it seems—but since you are at home, I shan't make company of you. I'm going up to dress for dinner."

"To dress? Will there be company? Oh, Nellie, I can't dress! Oh, my trunk isn't here yet and you know it. And here I must stay in the clothes I've worn on the train."

Florence gazed tellingly from beneath a hat-brim faced in black velvet. But it

was at George she gazed. George's wife hardened her heart.

"Oh, you're all right," said Nellie in the tone one woman uses to another when she means subtly to convey, "Oh, you're all wrong."

"Just home folks," soothed Nettleton. "Van is coming."

Florence turned to study him. "Will Mr. Johns be here?"

"Mr. Johns?" queried Nettleton, innocently.

"Yes; I've written him seven times and I've not heard even one solitary word—not even when I wired him."

Nettleton snickered behind his hand. "Yes—he'll be here!"

"Has he been at the office?" asked Miss Cole.

"Well, no—he's been on a sort of holiday!"

"Oh, George—I've guessed it—you've invited me up here so you could surprise me with a birthday dinner for dear old T.," gushed the little coquette.

Nettleton fairly snorted. "Ha, ha! Yes, that's it. Especially for dear old T."

"Well, what's the heavenly joke?" demanded Miss Cole.

"Nothing. Only with Van and T. both claimants for your heart and hand. I was wondering how you'd manage them."

Florence blushed, and then remembering the unanswered letters, blushed still more to find herself blushing. "Nonsense! They are just two silly boys—and I don't find myself caring a fig for either."

"No?" queried Nellie, catching Florence's hand and examining her ring.

"Stop it! That ring was given me by

my uncle—as a consolation—for being an old maid!"

"It's beautiful—but we are wasting time," said Mrs. Nettleton briskly. "You talk to George while I dress, and—" But beholding the calm alacrity with which Miss Cole prepared to follow her suggestion, Nellie concluded other than as she had begun. "I mean, suppose you come along with me, dearest—and we'll have a nice old fashioned chat."

As Florence started up the stairs humming happily at the thought of seeing her truant lover at his birthday dinner, Nellie leaned over the balustrade and hissed, "Enjoyed your little kiss—didn't you, George?"

"Run along, girls," said he pacifically. "And I'll bring Florence's suitcase."

"Fine—and if Nellie doesn't mind, I'll

hold your shaving mug," declared Florence.

But Nellie did mind.

"I think, Mr. Nettleton, you had better shave in the bathroom," said she. And Florence's unmistakable laugh greeted the ears of the returning butler.

"My God, that laugh! Oh, it couldn't be—it couldn't!" he ejaculated, with more firmness than faith.

"Sh-h-h-h-h. Mr. Boggs, sir," sounded an all too familiar voice, and as if that were her cue and signal of approach, Coddles sidled into the room holding one hand behind her. "Hi got a secret for you, sir," she said, smiling and screwing the little knot on top of her head a bit tighter as she drew down the skin of her forehead and pursed up her mouth like a bunny's own. Then as her beau ideal moved

away from her in alarm she spoke words to detain him.

"Ho, hit hain't habout me, sir. A gentelman came hup from Mr. Nettleton's hoffice just now, sir. But 'e couldn't wyte. Hit was habout your mail."

"What's that!"

"Yes, sir. 'E says that every hother dye 'e's been ha-puttin' them on the marster's desk—thinkin' as 'ow the marster would bring 'em 'ome ter yer—"

The butler surprised even the stolid soul of Coddles when he turned toward the stairs with doubled fists. "And he held back my mail, did he? Well, I'll show him—contract or no contract—"

Coddles ran after him and threw her arms about him. "He, Mr. Boggs, sir —Mr. Boggs, sir, don't!"

"Keep away, will you? Keep away!

Ah, you've got them—my letters—give them here!" And then as Coddles skipped away Boggs found the letters a magnet to draw him on, and on he followed as Coddles fled giggling around tables and chairs. But finally the damsel eluded him and got back of the table.

"Wot's they worth to you, Mr. Boggs, wot's they worth!" She pursed her lips and leaned across the table.

"Worth nothing! Hand them over!"

"I knowed they was from another woman—" whispered Coddles dropping them on the table in awe at the menace of his tone. She dabbed at the lids of her eyes with the corner of her apron and raised her voice in a wail of lamentation. "I knowed by the color of them and the sweet smell that they wuz from some young 'uzzy."

"No, they don't—they come from my—oldest daughter," replied the irrepressible Johns.

Coddles' wail subsided and her poor features gradually spread themselves in a grin of happiness. She began to edge toward him again as hope sprung once more in her breast.

"Do they now? Dearie me! Hi just want to arsk you something—most particular. Wot hever become of them three lydies?" A silly simper lit her face and her tongue pressed one corner of her mouth in the irritating imitation of shrewdness adopted by the weak-minded.

"Three ladies? What three ladies?" queried Johns in bewilderment total and absolute.

"W'y them—at you wuz married to—at different times, sir," giggled the lady.

"Oh, those! Coddles—I'll tell you.



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They came to violent ends—all of them!" answered Johns in a voice as from the sepulcher.

"Did they now? Dearie me. But hif Hi 'ad been one hof them Mrs. Boggses, sir—w'y—"

"Hold on there!" said Johns in desperation as to how to stop this sad caricature from her brazen caricature of a wooing. "Do you know what became of the last one—the third unhappy Mrs. Boggs?"

"No, sir. Wot?" said Coddles, lifting an empty face.

"It's a shame to take the money," thought Johns, and then went on inexorably: "I hung her up by the heels and skinned her."

Coddles blinked bleary eyes. This was a facer! But the love of a cockney woman is equal to almost any occasion.

"Yes, sir—very likely, sir. An' Hi'll bet yer a tuppence she jolly well deserved it. But hif Hi 'ad been that 'ere Mrs. Boggs, sir, an—" and dog-like faith beamed from her eyes.

"Oh, the dickens! What's the use?" cried the unhappy victim of persecution turning away, and deciding to forever abandon gentlemanly methods of finesse. *"Get out!"*

Did Coddles go? She went—but as she departed she reflected to herself that some men were "Hawful 'ard to tyke a 'int—an' has fer that un—you fair 'ad to 'it 'im with a 'atchet!"

Johns was fairly choking with rage as he looked at Florence's dear letters—the first was written on the eighteenth, and this was the twenty-ninth of the month. He felt that he was not being prospered in his wooing and wondered just how he

could let Florence know something of his predicament without giving that "ass" Nettleton the satisfaction of reaping in his five thousand dollar forfeit. So Thomas J. Vanderholt was allowed to ring the door-bell long and often with no attempt at response from the interior of the house.

"Ho, hello T.—how are you?" he said at last admitting himself. "It took you so all-fired long to answer that I walked right in. Well, T., this is a bit rough on you. . . . A little service, Boggs," and he took off his hat and coat and handed them to the silent Johns who was making no response to such greeting as was directed to him either in propria persona or as a menial. He knew it was a favorite trick of Van's to hold out his hand as in greeting and then lift it to smooth his hair instead!

"I'm glad to see you—and by yourself," said Johns, advancing with determination. "You flatter me. What's the secret?"

"It isn't a secret—it's pretty wide open. I want that contract canceled—and I want it done right now—!"

"Cancel your contract? Oh, T., ask me something easy. That agreement can be canceled only by mutual consent," smiled the lawyer, enjoying the wigglings of the victim he had hooked.

"Not when you drew it?"

"No."

"And you call yourself a lawyer?"

"Well—T., I manage to make a living without fighting my best interest on the way."

"But how? By drawing up illegal contracts?"

"How illegal?"

"Because all the covenants are on one side. And any court will see it."

"All right, then," said Vanderholt, shrugging his shoulders easily. "If I don't know my business, suppose you consult some other lawyer?"

"I can't—if I told a lawyer—or anybody else, it would cost me five thousand dollars cash. You put that in as a special clause."

Vanderholt smiled guilelessly in appreciation of his own cleverness.

"Well, if you don't like the agreement —break it—"

"And forfeit all my interest in the business! That's another of your infernal clauses. But I'll tell you, there are two things that are not in the agreement," cried Johns, banging heavy fist on broad palm in emphasis.

Vanderholt turned with suspicious

quickness. "Great scott! Did I forget something? What did I forget?"

"First, my personal mail. George has been holding it at the office, and no matter what it costs me, I'm going to punch his nose! And the other thing is this—you arranged for Nellie to know about the contract, and you've got to arrange for Florence to know!"

"Why?" queried his tormentor with honeyed sweetness.

"Because you've put me in a hole. I can't even write to her without lying—and I'm not going to lie to Florence."

Vanderholt smiled at him thoughtfully. Then he spoke with slow significance.

"Well, if that's what you want, you'll have to arrange it with George."

"Meaning that you won't do it?"

"No, I won't," and Thomas J. Vanderholt turned away, lest Johns see on his

triumphant face that the present state of affairs was exactly what he had felt a "consummation devoutly to be wished."

Johns smiled with a look of intelligence, and suggested he knew a bit of the lawyer's mental process. "Well, you jobbed me—got me going and coming. But I am going to telegraph Florence to-day, saying I am safe and well, and for further information please apply to Thomas J. Vanderholt, referee."

"Wha-what? Oh, no, you don't—you bet you don't—you . . ." cried the referee, advancing with an unbecoming shade of purple spreading its way across his face beneath his silvered locks. Johns checked him lightly.

"And when that little lady comes down from Albany—it's nighty-night for you. Well? What will you tell her?"

"Telegraph if you like," smiled Van-

derholt. "But if you give information leading toward the contract—it would be equivalent to a direct violation."

"It wouldn't—"

"In your opinion. But as referee with powers to decide all questions of dispute, I'm afraid I should have to decide that point against you!" And the smile said "Checkmate."

"All right! Then I'll find some other way to get you and George B. Nettleton —he may go to—"

"Boggs!" As the voice floated down from the regions above, "Boggs" involuntarily came to attention. "Is that Mr. Vanderholt down there? You must announce guests at once—that is distinctly one of your duties—you are insubordinate."

"Boggs—your master's voice," smiled Vanderholt, equable again. "Of course,

you understand there'll be a nominal fee —of fifty dollars for legal consultation."

Johns advanced furiously. "What! I won't pay it! You get that—I won't —what do you and George think I am—a gold mine you have discovered and staked a claim to?" His advance threatened to become an onslaught.

"Why, Boggs! How dare you assume that attitude toward my guest? Remember your position. Go get the cocktails!" commanded Nettleton from a turn of the stairs.

"All right. But, say—now get out your little red book. I'm going through with that contract, no matter what the two of you try to do to me. But in one year—if I'm still surviving—I'm going to crawl all over you—both of you!"

And the butler made a most unbutler-like exit, as the book came out.

Five minutes later he returned with a trayful of cocktails mixed after a formula all his own, and meant for the consumption of the enemies of T. Boggs Johns! He came marching into the room with a truly correct air that he felt sure would save him from any fine of one hundred dollars.

And then suddenly the tray slid from his hands and he stood staring at a vision that would at any other time have seemed more beautiful than strange. Florence Cole stood on the landing of the stairs chatting easily with Thomas J. Vanderholt! She turned at the exclamation of "Boggs" and for a second stared blankly at the individual in servant's livery who was gazing at her with his heart in his eyes and a grim expression around his mouth. Then she bristled up exactly as

a girl with her shade of red hair might have been expected to do.

"T.! T.!" she called sharply. "Where have you been? What does this mean? Those awful clothes! And those horrible side whiskers! Where have you been?"

"Here—for two weeks," replied a dejected voice.

"Here? But I heard you were on a holiday!"

A hollow "Ha! Ha!" was the only rejoinder!

The fair inquisitor went on: "What! You were neither away nor at your office, and never told me a single thing? Then tell me now. Tell me now, T."

"Florence—" Her lover turned to her impulsively and then turned away. It was scarcely meet that the butler at Mr. George B. Nettleton's home should em-

brace Mrs. Nettleton's guest—and, besides, the dread of that little red book removed all the spontaneous desire to make love lest it be not in the contract and the referee take fiendish pleasure in saying so.

"Oh, T., what is it? I haven't had one line or word, and I've just been waiting —waiting. Darling—tell—me—please," said Miss Cole, quite unabashed at the presence of her interested spectators.

Johns shot one glance at the faces that seemed to him fairly glowering with anticipated triumph. He shut his eyes to the girl's sweetly glowing face and gulped down his emotion rather than swallow the vindictive pleasure of the men who might see Florence in her very love defeat him.

"Dearest—I can't!"

And at that "Dearest" the red book

came out. And Johns had to console himself with the assurance that Vanderholt would give more than $100 for the privilege of calling Florence even "Dear!"

Miss Cole took a decided backward step. "You mean—*you won't!* Then I'll find out."

And at that moment Van and Nettleton, deciding that absence was the better part of silence, vanished discreetly up the stairs.

Whereupon Miss Cole took her love-making into her own hands and came to the butler's side and took him in her arms! "You tell me nothing! I'm all upset, T. Comfort me."

Which he did.

Then the lady went on. "No answers to my letters. No answers to me—the woman who is to be your wife. And I

find you here—in buttons—and an unspeakable pair of—monkey whiskers—*Oh!* Please tell me it's all a joke."

But her lover sadly assured her that it was far from a joke. Nor yet something to be ashamed of. And then he besought her to wait for him—for the trifling period of eleven months and two weeks! And in spite of being reminded that she had not red hair for nothing and might be tried too far, the unhappy man persisted in his silence. And then with tears in her eyes and battle in her heart, Miss Florence Cole, of Albany, removed from the ring finger of her left hand a bauble consisting of two diamonds and a ruby and handed it to T. Boggs Johns. And, most strange to say, he took it. And, more surprisingly still, he spoke these words as he accepted his ring and his congé:

"Thank you! This is the first little thing—of actual value—that had come my way—for two whole weeks!"

And a descending hostess flanked on either side by two rather frightened men was met by a demand for explanations—which were not forthcoming!

"Well, Florence, I'd really like to satisfy your pardonable curiosity, but as far as I can see there is only one person who can really afford to tell you what you want to know," said her host blandly.

"You mean T.? I've asked him again."

"What? He told you?" cried Nettleton, hopefully.

"No, he didn't!"

"Oh, what a pity!"

"Well, you all seem to lose sight of one thing. Mr. Johns means nothing to me —ab-so-lute-ly nothing. I am demand-

ing this explanation not on his account, but on mine!"

While Vanderholt looked his hope, her host and hostess rose in evident relief and fairly chorused together: "Well, in that case, Florence, what difference does it make whether or not T. is a butler?"

"Well, it is an insult to me. You and Nellie invite me here to see me mortified and ashamed."

Nellie's voice was pathetically injured as she replied, "Why, darling, how *unjust* you are to me? I didn't ask you. My husband did. And I never knew a *single* thing about it until I got your telegram saying you were coming!"

Which helped matters so much that Florence flounced up the stairway on her declared way to a hotel.

"Florence! Florence! Come back—I'll tell you all about it!" cried her dis-

tracted hostess after the retreating figure.

"Nellie—for the Lord's sake don't!" begged her husband frantically.

Then Thomas J. Vanderholt came nobly to the rescue.

"As referee," he said, "of course you understand there'll be a nominal legal fee, but—"

"To the Dickens with the fee," cried his host. "Do you mean you will explain to Florence?"

"Yes—if you take yourself and your wife off and leave me to tackle her alone," replied the wily member of the legal profession.

And Nettleton led away his weeping spouse, who had decided on an attack of hysterics, while Van was left to "tackle" Florence.

## CHAPTER X

### IN WHICH THE LAWYER PLEADS HIS CAUSE AND BETRAYS HIS CASE

FIVE minutes later Miss Cole descended with an armful of coat, suit-case, and jewel bag, while a black velvet hat perched jauntily on her nose. Thomas J. Vanderholt was waiting to greet her.

"My dear Florence," he began.

Judicially she interrupted him. "Have I ever given you the right to call me your dear Florence?"

"Well—no—but I'm asking for the right."

"And why at such a time?" interrupted the girl gravely. "You see in what a hurry I am to leave this horrid place."

"I—I—didn't intend to—only—you—well, you rather forced my hand. Oh, I didn't mean it that way—but you see my d—— Miss Florence, I have a purely legal mind. And—"

"Very well. *We'll* put it on a purely *legal* basis. Now, then, you are asking for a certain right. In other words you want to marry me," said that incomprehensible young person. And as her would-be lover stepped away in astonishment she folded her arms in a businesslike manner. "Very well—a hearing for the plea is granted." Then she calmly arranged her baggage on the table and seated herself in an evident mood of anticipation.

The wooer was visibly nervous. This was not quite the first girl he had besought for favor. But never before had he been so brazenly helped along. And,

manlike, he found the fruit that was ready to fall from the tree at a single shake of its branches a little less desirable than when it had seemed so firmly lodged as to be a bit beyond his taking.

"You have a way of taking the wind out of a fellow's sails," he gasped.

"Then paddle!" ordered Florence concisely. "Don't delay proceedings!"

"All right. I suppose I've got to," he said, wishing she would be coy and alluring instead of so serenely ready to hear and concede. "As I—er—intimated—er—before, I had—er—no intention of making love to you—that is to-day—but since you—er—bring the subject up—er—yourself. I—I—would like—er—some sort of an answer."

"Very well, I'll give it."

Vanderholt stepped toward her ex-

pectantly. Over-willing or no, Florence Cole was sure to be a delicious armful of sweetness. And her lips had a most provocative curve.

The lady stopped him with a wave of her white hand. "But first I want to ask a legal question. Do you think it just—or 'reasonable—for two young people—such as you and I—to start out on their married life with a secret holding them apart?"

She smiled sweetly, but the wily lawyer took himself an inch or two out of the danger zone.

"Well—no—er—they—shouldn't."

"Good! Then why is T. a butler?"

Thomas J. Vanderholt removed the arm he had slid along the back of her chair and also himself.

"Eh? Oh, come now—dear—that

isn't exactly fair. It ain't exactly professional for the lawyer in the case to well —to—er—"

"Ah! So you *were* in it!" said Florence with quiet satisfaction. "But since you refuse to trust me—to tell me—my answer is—"

She stood up haughtily, and as she became a trifle more remote she became again all to be desired, and the lawyer rose to the occasion and told her all about the neat little scheme he had evolved for saving the business of the Eureka Digestive Pill Company.

"And why didn't George tell me that?" said Miss Cole in slow wonder.

"Because by telling anyone he'd lose five thousand dollars."

Florence laughed appreciatively. "Oh, I see! But it was funny. And you

suggested the idea. How clever of you, Van."

Van promptly assumed a pompous air. Here was a wife who would appreciate him after all—even if her father turned out not to be such a wealthy man as rumor had it. "Oh, I don't know. At least it was a solution of the problem."

And then Florence found out that Van had drawn up the agreement, and had dealt the cards, and that George had won on a mere pair of sixes. As he went on with the tale of his clever little scheme, Thomas J. became more and more inflated with pride. And the unfaithful little minx who had just returned a ring to one sad suitor, laughed merrily as she archly cross-questioned the man who was primarily responsible for the defeat of that other candidate for her heart and hand. Van

found himself wondering if any man could ever be sure of that tricky little red head. And then he decided to take a chance and insist on his answer at once.

"And now that you do know, Florence—"

"And now that I do know, Van, I'll give you my answer. If you were the last lone man on earth, and I was fifty-five and the first old maid in my family, *I wouldn't marry you!*"

And as the "butler" came in by one door cheerily whistling "You Made Me What I Am To-day," the man who had dealt him a lone queen of hearts went out by the other.

"Come in, T. I want to speak to you," called Miss Cole as cheerfully as if that gentleman had not debonairly accepted his dismissal—and her ring—from her hands a half an hour before.

"And I want to speak to you! Florence—I'm going to tell you everything —if it means my last cent on earth—my one last crumb of bread—I'm here—because—" he cried, seizing her in his arms.

"No—no—no—no!" chanted Florence, and then as he looked at her in great amazement, she went on: "Don't! It's too expensive! Besides, I've found out!"

"Did George tell you?" he asked hopefully, as George had asked, "Did T. tell you?"

"No. You haven't won five thousand yet," and Florence smiled indulgently.

"Oh, I thought maybe luck had turned," replied T., too deep in dejection over the fact that he had found that a servant's lot is not a happy one to be happy because the girl he loved knew why she must wait eleven months and two weeks. The eleven months and two weeks were

still there, for he could hardly suppose that the Cole family were going to give their only daughter to a member of "servants' hall."

"Why do you submit to this?" asked Florence militantly.

"Submit? I guess you haven't read that contract!"

"Hang the contract! The harder it is, the better I like it. It runs for a year, doesn't it?"

"Yes, for one whole year." And T. bowed his head in his hands.

"Oh, T., brace up and be a man," said Miss Florence, sitting tentatively on the edge of his chair and wondering how long it would take for him to notice her nearness—and *be* a man! "To my mind the word *man* is better than the word *master*. Why don't you turn the tables on him?"

"On George? How?" groaned T., without lifting his head.

Florence rose. "What's any man's weakest point?"

This man looked at her miserably. "I don't know."

"What's any poor married idiot's weakest point? Oh, it might not be yours, self-contained Mister T., but with most men —it's the wife."

"Nellie?" asked T., dully.

"Of course," replied Florence with energy. "That's where you've got to hit him—hard! As long as you're miserable he's happy. Make him unhappy. Serve him and serve him well. Serve him with energy and diligence—but always with a smile. And George will wonder why. Keep close to Nellie. Make it seem that you are happy to be near Nellie."

"That's easy," replied the fatuous Johns.

"But not too near, T.—for I will be looking on—and green eyes go with red hair."

"Yours are blue as the heavens, dearest," protested Johns. Florence smiled happily.

"Just hit him, T.—hit him where he lives! He wants you to break the contract. Make him break it! Do you get me?"

"Yes, I do!" shouted Johns.

"Then go after him—and *get him!* But don't forget to smile!"

*"Florence! You Queen! The only thing I ever needed to get—was just you!"* shouted T., happily and gathered his lucky queen of hearts into his arms.

When a man becomes engaged to the lady of his choice in so unromantic a place

as his business office and then leaves her and suffers a hiatus of two gaping weeks sans her presence, the first chance he gets to embrace her is embraced.

Johns was distinctly the type of man to whom life represents two things: Love and business. For a weary fortnight he had been deprived of both. Now he went about his love-making with the careful attention to detail some men save for business. Florence's radiant pink and white prettiness robed in cool green and crowned in glowing copper absorbed him. He fairly crushed her in hungry arms and sank into a deep chair with his little love pressed to his heart.

## CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE BUTLER ACTS ON FLORENCE'S SUGGESTION AND CODDLES KNOWS A BRIEF MOMENT OF TRIUMPH

EVERYTHING was silent. Time was measured out in ecstatic heart beats. Suddenly a wail of anguish rent the air. Another wail and yet another. It was a soul in agony, a creature in malign torture. Nothing but the death throes of love and the birth-pain of jealousy ever sounded quite so stupendously awful. But as Florence leaped from her cozy place on her lover's knee, she laughed. And T. Boggs Johns burrowed deeper and deeper into his comfortable chair and shouted and chortled with full enjoyment of what tickled his risibilities.

But the siren sound of shrieking outshouted them.

Down the stairs plunged Thomas J. Vanderholt, visibly excited for once in his cool judicial life. Still giggling wildly, Florence Cole seized her little black suitcase of walrus skin and fled from the house where she had learned so much. And the butler still lolled in his chair shouting weakly and mirthfully. But the screaming did not weaken.

The library door opened, and George B., followed by Nellie Nettleton, entered the room. The master fairly catapulted into a figure that stood mourning with a soiled white apron thrown over its head. It was Coddles, weeping like a very Niobe and shouting like a very Calliope. For Coddles had seen her beloved Mr. Boggs with that red-headed "'uzzy" on his knees! And hope had died in Coddles'

breast. She was not to be the fourth Misses Boggs after all. This is a cruel world for women—and Coddles had tasted of the bitter fruit of the tree of knowledge that her love loved another and a fairer woman!

"Coddles! What's the matter!" demanded her master.

She wailed anew and pointed blindly in the general direction of the roaringly mirthful and merry Boggs—he of the hitherto mournful mien.

"Boggs! What have you done to Coddles?" demanded Nettleton with such savageness as chivalrous man could muster at the thought of any attack upon the emotions of that poor drab slattern.

"Coddles!" hiccoughed the hitherto sober butler. Then he advanced a tentative hand and seized upon one of the scorned cocktails of his mixing.

The red book entered upon the scene, and Nettleton poised his pencil above it in businesslike fashion. "Stop that infernal shouting—do you hear me?" he commanded. "What the devil does it mean?"

Johns drained that cocktail with the relish of one who knows exactly what has gone into its concoction. Then he reached for another and elevated two large, well-shod feet to the library table, while his hand waved an empty glass and sank at last limply over the arm of the chair. "Say, George, just charge me up with another hundred, will you?" he cachinnated.

"I can't just tell you why it's worth it, but it is; it's worth it and a darn sight more," and, laughing ever more merrily, T. Boggs Johns proceeded to consume a third cocktail. Fortunately Nellie's full

glass was on the mantel and far out of reach. Three cocktails are enough for any butler!

"He's drunk! Van, I want you to make a legal note of that—he's drunk!" shouted George wildly.

And as everyone was engaged after his own fashion, Coddles took her apron from before her face and surveyed the scene. There was no possible use in yelling if no one paid any attention to you. On the other hand, if no one paid any attention to you, that was cause and cause enough for having hysterics. So Nellie promptly and thoroughly proceeded to have them!

As for Mr. Johns, his partner's wildly shrilled, "He's drunk! I want you to make a legal note of that," arrested his attention. This seemed a particularly propitious moment to put into practice

Florence's little scheme. He could well begin "hitting George where he lived" by seeming to betray his infatuation for Nellie during the maudlin ravings of inebriation. He removed his feet from the table and stared curiously from woman to woman. Then a slow and crafty smile overspread a face meant for the cherubic type the fat man has to look even when he is sad and mournful.

"Don't cry, Nellie," he begged, advancing, a cocktail glass in hand, and scattering a little shower of drops as he came. "Don't cry, Nellie, old girl—makes poor old Boggs sad to see you cry. Sho shad! Sho—so—s—sad!" he articulated with seeming difficulty.

Nellie promptly stopped screaming and looked into the beamingly sympathetic face bending above her.

"Did I frighten you, little girl! Sho

shorry to shee you sho shad!" he repeated, wagging his head sorrowfully and then critically examining the glass he held, he tilted it up and drained the final drop that lingered lone and solitary. "Poor lil Nellie," he added, and then, sighting the remaining glass of his cocktail mixture where it stood on the mantel, he made a sudden charge upon it.

Now Nellie had the true "ministering angel" attitude toward life, and when there seemed a necessity of helping someone for whom she had an honest regard and who offered her the sympathetic understanding she always insisted on thinking she craved, she could indefinitely postpone her own hysterics in favor of serving. She placed a cool little hand on the kindly souled, even if somewhat drunken Boggs, and steered him carefully away from the twinkling, luring glass.

"Poor old Boggs, you're tired," she said gently. "You must go up to your room and rest—or go out into the fresh air and take a walk—or something. Why, George! see how your cruel joke of having Florence here has upset him. It *was* cruel—wantonly cruel. I'm sure," righteously. "I never saw T. drink too much before, and now look what he's had to do to drown his sorrow!"

"I'll teach him to drown a little more than his sorrow," cried George, making a vicious lunge at his butler.

Boggs immediately fell upon his neck and began patting his whilom enemy upon the back. "Poor old Georgie," he gurgled. And then he danced heavily away and fell with added vigor and the full force of his two hundred and ten pounds of avoirdupois upon Van's neck, and chanted the formula: "Poor old Van."

Coddles stood expectant. Her tongue was in her cheek and her fingers twitched to clasp her chosen swain close in the presence of witnesses. She slid the heel of her flat shoe across the rug and back again in delicious anticipation. And then Boggs collapsed into a chair and put his hand to his head and began moaning, "Oh, my head! Poor old Boggs's poor old head!"

"Warmint! Wiper!" muttered Coddles.

Nellie prepared to repay sympathetic understanding with understanding sympathy. She fell on her knees by the chair where cowered the moaning man.

"Get up!" yelled her husband, fairly dancing with rage. "Stop making a fuss about that jellyfish! If I were as drunk as that you'd be retaining Van to draw up a divorce!"

"Poor boy! He has cause to drink himself into forgetting!" snapped Nellie. "Probably it doesn't seem worth your while to consider how you would have felt once upon a time if anyone had put you into a similar position before me. Oh-h-h-h-h! A man who will treat his defenseless partner so won't stop at anything when it comes to his defenseless wife. Oh-h-h-h!"

"She's off again," chuckled Van sympathetically.

"Oh, what a night," shouted the master of the house. "Here, Van, you take his head and I'll take his heels and we'll get this drunken idiot up to his room, and then we'll go to a hotel for dinner."

"And leave the poor thing to suffer alone?" moaned Nellie. But at the mention of going to a hotel for dinner she had begun to brighten a bit and was cau-

tiously dabbing her nose with a bit of swansdown.

"No, we won't leave him to suffer alone," said her husband righteously. "Here, Coddles, get a basin of icewater and some cloths and you can sit and bathe his head."

A look of slow and heavenly rapture dawned on Coddles' face. And one of quick agony o'erspread the recently bland countenance of T. Boggs Johns.

"I feel inhuman going off and leaving T. to suffer—remorse and—" ventured Nellie.

"It'll be remorse all right," shouted Van.

"Go and order a table at the Valthorpe and quit sniffing over this hunk of humanity," said George with such savage emphasis that Johns knew there was balm in Gilead after all.

## CHAPTER XII

### IN WHICH SEVERAL COUPLES FIND THEMSELVES BADLY MISMATED

FIFTEEN minutes later a taxi whirled the Nettletons and Thomas J. Vanderholt to the very hotel where Florence Cole, alone and unchaperoned, had ventured to send for the manager and tell him that she had been compelled to stop in New York on some most important business and that her father, the Senator, had felt that she would be safest right there in the Valthorpe. A play of dimples and sparkling eyes had convinced the manager that it was worth staking his life and reputation to see that no harm came to Miss Cole.

With his stateliest air the manager es-

corted his lovely charge to the elevator, and any further vouching for was furnished when that young woman was seized in the embrace of the pretty young bride who occupied the most expensive suite in the ultra-expensive Valthorpe.

"Flossie Cole!" shouted a glad voice.

"Bessie Skinner!" shouted another.

"Bessie Applegate!" corrected glad voice number one. "And this is Mr. Applegate—my husband. Dearest, I want you to meet my old roommate at Fulham Manor—my schoolgirl chum."

The President of the Northwestern Drug Company was delighted to meet so charming a friend of his wife's. The manager of the Valthorpe was delighted to oblige two such charming ladies, especially when in the background lurked the greatest drug baron of the Middle West. And so presently Miss Cole was duly in-

stalled three doors away from the prettiest little chaperon imaginable and was fluffing up in a borrowed frock and preparing to dine on the Valthorpe roof with the Applegates and a "clever young chap in whom they were interested."

Now we will have to take a little survey of the past week in order to find just how grave was the danger threatening the affairs of George B. Nettleton and his butler-partner, T. Boggs Johns.

When Tony Toler took Miss Sally Parker to dinner on the eventful evening after he was dismissed from the employ of the Eureka Digestive Pill Company events began to shape themselves for the utter destruction of that company. Sally was proud of the news she had to impart and Tony fairly shouted with laughter at her story of how one hand of "show down poker" had metamorphosed T.

Boggs Johns into one "Boggs"—butler.

"Say, kiddo!" said he, "how'd you think that old firm is going to stand without Johns and me to hustle? If there was any competition in the pill business it 'ud knock 'em galley west."

"Why don't you start a rival firm, Tony, and show 'em something? Get old Kromie away from 'em—he knows chemistry and formulas all right. Maybe little Sally could design you a color and a pill box—and you are known as the snappiest salesman in the business."

"Say, child, that's some idea to come out of that pretty little yellow head of yours."

"Yes, an' I got more'n ideas—I got three hundred dollars saved up," giggled Miss Parker.

Tony was all business. "Say, we three'd make swell partners. Kromie to

make the pills, me to sell 'em, and you to be the brains of the concern. I got a couple of hundred of my own. If old Krome has a bit and we can just scare up a few likely customers, we can break away in a couple of weeks. I think we could stand a little bottle of Chianti to drink to that, little Sally—are you on?"

Sally was "on"—and "Kromie" was soon put "on." The tentative partners agreed that they had better stay where they were for a month or two and wait for the Eureka Digestive Pill Company to begin definitely to lose ground. In the meantime Tony was to keep informed as to any "prospects" in the line of big customers and to try to make sure of a reasonable amount of business that he could secure as soon as the new firm of "Parker, Toler and Krome" was launched.

Life for Sally was one long dream of

delight in that every evening saw her dining at a different restaurant with the younger and more desirable of her two new partners. They met ostensibly to talk over business—while conservative Krome gave up solitaire on the New Rochelle express and took to working out formulae for digestive pills instead.

Strange and wonderful were the things he could do with permutations and commutations of grams and drops and ounces of cinchona, colchicum, aloes, asafœtida, strychnine, sodium and peptonoids!

Stranger and more wonderful were the things that Miss Sally Parker could do with a pair of blue eyes, a bit of rouge judiciously applied, some golden curls a-straying, a black velvet hat and a waist of tulle. And everything pointed to the probability that the firm of Parker, Toler & Krome would, without losing one of its

three members, become the firm of Toler & Krome. And poor harassed George Nettleton was soon to sense storms in the offing.

On the afternoon of June 29th a little telephone conversation took place between Sally Parker and Tony Toler.

Said he: "That you, Sallikins? Well, girlie, in the interests of business suppose we don't dine together to-night? I got a big customer almost nailed and he has asked me to have dinner on the Valthorpe roof with himself and bride."

Said she: "I suppose I ain't good enough for the Valthorpe roof. You never took me there."

Said he: "Oh, come now, Sally. The Valthorpe is twenty stories up and equally steep in prices. We can't afford it yet. But wait until the firm gets next to this guy."

Said she: "Why didn't you tell 'em you had an engagement with a lady? Betcha they'd of fallen for it and asked me, too."

"Sally, I don't want to queer myself with a big man like the president of—" began Tony.

But "queer yourself—queer yourself!" muttered Sally and hung up the receiver and ignored its jingling for five minutes and then calmly removed the offending instrument from its hook and went about her work. Her work in this instance was to fascinate one Charley Krome so utterly and completely that the New Rochelle express was lighter by one that night, and Krome was a conscious and proud escort for the emphasized charms of Miss Sally Parker when the fashionable hour of 7:30 brought the press of hungry New York to its favorite restaurant.

"Will you look who's here," cried George B. Nettleton as the smiling "Captain" led the party of three to the table for which Nellie had 'phoned. "Old Kromie and Miss Parker! There sure *ain't* any exclusive restaurants in New York any more!"

But just how ill that combination boded for him, George B. could not guess.

Miss Parker was enjoying herself famously. She was wondering if Tony and his big customer would sit near at hand. She calculated the exact amount of sweetness and the exact amount of chill with which she would infuse her bow. She shrugged her shoulders in anticipated enjoyment of Tony's feelings when he beheld her with the conservative Krome standing as host for a Valthorpe dinner.

Then suddenly the head waiter was deferentially bowing a party of four to a

nearby table. And with equal deference Tony Toler was escorting a vision of copper hair and swirling white chiffon.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Toler. It *is* nice meeting again," purred a sweet high voice.

Miss Cole! Tony was getting in with the real swells! So that was why he could not ask President Applegate of the Northwestern Drug Company to include Miss Sally Parker in his dinner party.

Sally leaned across the table and turned the battery of her most magnetic smiles on Krome. And the enmity to the Eureka Digestive Pill Company took on a brand new phase.

But in the Nettleton home a well-nigh distraught Coddles was pounding on a locked door and informing the shouting, chortling person behind that door that "'E'd die of delerimum trimminks—that's wot 'e would hif 'e didn't look sharp."



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## CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH THE NETTLETON FOURTH OF JULY IS PLENTIFULLY SUPPLIED WITH FIREWORKS

THE morning of July first dawned cool and fair. But for the Nettleton family the serenity of the day was overcast before breakfast was finished.

"Considering the spree he went on night before last, that fool butler of ours has been managing pretty well for the past day," remarked George B.

"T. is so clever that he can even fit himself into his humiliating position of service with grace and savoir faire," agreed Nellie.

George crumpled his paper irritably.

"Because, I say, he managed fairly well, doesn't mean you need start an oration on Boggs's talents."

"There you go, George, getting ugly on the slightest provocation. I wish you had a sunshiny, amiable nature like T.'s."

"For the love of Mike, Nellie, don't begin studying the dispositions of the servants and holding them up as models. If you set that fashion I might suggest that you follow Miss Parker's example of smiling and humming 'when things don't go to suit you,' instead of going off into hysterics every time you are annoyed."

"That fresh little stenographer of yours, George! How can you obtrude her in your home? The atrocious way she was gotten up on the Valthorpe Roof the other night and the audible sniff she gave every time she looked toward Florence

with Tony Toler and the Appletons placed her as a pert little upstart."

"She's a nice little girl. But I wonder what she and Krome were doing there. And Tony Toler with the Appletons! No use, Nellie, some of these things have a meaning of their own. They've got me worried."

"Oh, George!" exclaimed Nellie, immediately becoming misty about her eyelashes. "Don't tell me the business is going down hill since poor dear, clever T. is out of it! You never were a diplomat or a financier, and T.—"

George gulped down his last swallow of coffee, slashed his napkin savagely across the breakfast cloth and fled with a final objurgation that seemed to consign "poor T." to a climate of eternal summer heat.

And all day long T. made life smooth and comfortable for Nellie. And all day long a tearful-eyed and snappy tempered Sally Parker made things decidedly uncomfortable for George.

Tony Toler had neglected to phone Sally since the evening she had discovered him dining with the Appletons and Miss Cole. Poor Sally kept visioning her favorite swain in the company of "that red-haired siren." It was not until the evening before the glorious Fourth that life took on a more roseate hue for Sally, and even then there was a little rift within the lute of her perfect happiness.

"H'lo Sallikins!" said the flippantly easy voice of her favored suitor. "You and Kromie hand in your resignations to old Nettleton to take effect Saturday, July 11.

"I've got Apple[illegible] where I want him

—eating out of my hand, and I've seen a swell little suite of offices we can rent for a month down. The thirteenth is my lucky day. Will draw up the incorporation papers of Parker, Toler and Krome then. How about it, little girl?"

"Awright, Tony. But ain't I going to see you before then?" said Miss Parker a bit wistfully. "The Fourth's a holiday all day. Of course, Mr. Krome has mentioned a trip to Coney, but—"

"You just go with Kromie and keep him rooting for the firm, Sally girl. I've got to take a little trip with the Appletons on the Fourth. That's when I'll land him posi-blooming-lutely!" clicked back the freshly insouciant voice over the wire.

"I suppose Miss Cole will complete the quartette," minced Sally in her best society voice, but there was a bit of pain in it.

"I wonder what she sticks around New York for when she can't see Mr. Johns!"

"Say, where is Johns? He sure isn't a dangerous rival," snickered Tony fatuously.

Sally looked like a dangerous rival as she banged up the receiver after crisply announcing that Mr. Johns would probably turn up in plenty of time to put flip salesmen in their places!

Now Miss Florence Cole, of Albany, was not lingering in New York without satisfactory cause. She found that there were two important matters chaining her to the city. One of them was to see just what Tony Toler's game with the president of the Northwestern Drug Company might be—and what the other matter was will appear in due season.

George Nettleton's holiday was made

no more cheerful by the receipt of twin resignations from Krome and Sally Parker. He wildly wondered just how he could conduct the waning business of the Eureka Digestive Pill Company without the aid of Johns, Tony Toler, Sally or Krome. The only staff he had to lean upon was his red-headed office boy, whose fresh manner and taste for raspberry colored shirts were fast getting on the jangled nerves of George B. Nettleton.

He spent the holiday in his office wearily figuring ways and means as to how to make the business continue to support himself, Nellie and that "lazy lout" T. Boggs Johns.

When told that their only holiday excursion would be dinner at some roof garden, Nellie became tearful, and then as her husband irritably explained that he simply had to work all day, she took ref-

uge in sullen silence as a variant of the hysterics with which she generally met a failure to get her own way.

"Not going anywhere to-day, Nellie?" inquired "Boggs," when George had slammed his way out of the house in the irritable fashion that he had come recently to do all things.

"No, T. Isn't it a shame? Poor George has to work."

"To work, Nellie? You mean making out bills for all the orders that are streaming in. That's Krome's work."

"I don't know, T. Just to write letters, I guess. Poor boy, he does work hard," said Nellie virtuously.

T. smiled, and curled one corner of his lips up in scorn that was not intended to escape Nellie. "And does Miss Parker have to work too on the holiday?" he asked lightly. "Well, every man to his taste,

and I'd rather be home with you. So I'm selfishly glad you are not to have your usual holiday celebration this year."

After that pride demanded that Nellie assure George that she had spent an unusually pleasant day when he inquired solicitously as he shaved for dinner that evening.

"I've a table at the Valthorpe, Nellie, and I'll ask Van and Florence to join us. We'll have your favorite Sauterne cup and make it one grand jamboree."

"I prefer to dine at home," said Nellie with stately dignity. "It will be so lonesome for poor T. alone on the holiday night."

"Drat you!" cried George with such vehemence that he scratched a furrow in one cheek.

"And I really am not pining for Florence's company," went on his wife.

"Wasn't Miss Parker in the office to-day? Haven't you had enough of young 'flappers' so you can put up with your wife's society?"

"Nellie, darling!" protested George.

"Nellie darling," turned on him quickly. "Where did you lunch? Was Miss Parker in the office? Was Krome there? Did you work all day?"

"Did T. work all day?" retorted George savagely. "Or did you try to make things pleasant for him?"

Nellie glared in turn. Decidedly there were fireworks a-plenty at the Nettleton Fourth of July!

## CHAPTER XIV

### IN WHICH T. BOGGS JOHNS BEGINS TO ENJOY HIMSELF

On the next day events roamed down a lane of many turnings. It was not a peaceful Sunday!

Now there was once a mother who on leaving her children alone for the day admonished them in this wise:

"Children, don't put beans up your noses."

The child mind is fertile soil. The children had never thought of such a proceeding, but great is the power of suggestion and they all were allured by forbidden fruit. Putting beans up their noses be-

came supremely to be desired—and a doctor reaped a rich harvest in the home of the admonitory mamma that night.

The masculine mind has always a certain childish quality. And so it, too, is fertile soil! And George B. Nettleton "put beans up his nose" on the noon of Monday, July 6, by inviting Sally Parker out to lunch! His wife suspected him of having done it—ergo—he would do it.

And Sally, in a burst of emotion and gratitude mixed with jealousy at beholding Tony Toler, the Appletons and that "Cole girl" at a near-by table, told Nettleton all about the projected new firm, withdrew her resignation, and treacherously promised to do her best to keep Krome in the old firm.

And all the while Tony Toler unsuspectingly ate his luncheon with the placid reflection that Miss Cole was all to the

good and that he'd be able to square it with little Sally as soon as she knew.

As for "little Sally" as she swept by the Appletons' table with a somewhat panic-stricken employé in her train, this is the snatch of conversation that wounded her ear: "And you'll come with me yourself this afternoon to help me select the ring? Say, you are a brick of a girl."

And in spite of a "broken heart," Miss Parker had to sit until six-thirty clicking out the letters her employer had savagely begun to dictate the moment they reached the office.

In the meantime events were moving with equal rapidity at the Nettleton home. And as things were not traveling along parallel lines, a crash was imminent—and unavoidable.

In the buff and brown living room of George B. Nettleton's abode all was quiet.

Suddenly Coddles came creeping down the stairway making a silent pretense of sweeping as she came. On the landing she paused in rapt attention with a growing expression of wonderment on her worry-knotted features. Through the door leading to the servants' quarters came the butler, "Boggs." But such a changed Boggs as Coddles' unwinking blue marble eyes beheld! He was a beaming refutation of "Nobody loves a fat man," for every inch of his big, good-looking face glowed with self-appreciation, backed by a happy certainty of a few rivals in his admiration society.

He was singing cheerily to himself as he entered jauntily, balancing a tray on his upturned hand. Coddles' hand went to her bosom as if she meant to hold her palpitating maiden heart in place.

"Heavinks!" she muttered. "'Ow

graceful 'e his hat 'andlin' them wichy bottles and the bacchante of wisky!"

She watched entranced while he set the tray on the table and picked up the duster and began flirting it daintily across everything in sight. The decanter, the picture of his lucky queen, and the torn sixes, the cushions, Nellie's fancy work on the round table across the room and finally a blooming hydrangea—with unspairing thoroughness and lightly tripping wrist, Boggs dusted them all. Coddles watched him in silent open-mouthed wonder. Her mental process might be slow and plodding, but most decidedly she was having one!

Johns took his master's house slippers, arranged them with mathematical precision at the side of Nettleton's pet easy chair, and then skipping daintily to one side, clasped his hands and gazed in ec-

stasy at the result of his labors. Coddles gazed too, in open-mouthed astonishment.

"For his little tootsy-tootsies!" cried the big man in a shrill, childish staccato.

Coddles could contain herself no longer. She sped down the steps to the side of the man she once ventured to consider as a matrimonial possibility.

Johns turned, masking his annoyance under an elaborate air of surprised innocence. "Oh, hello, Coddles! Are you there?"

Coddles sidled closer with an air of deep concern. "Ho, Mr. Boggs, sir, wot mykes yer so h'awful 'appy?"

"I? Happy? Am I?" he replied, twirling the duster and executing a little pas seul.

"Yes, sir. H'oh, sir, wot were that there song you were a-singin'?"

"Did you like it, Coddles? Attend me and I'll teach it you." A heavy pirouette, a ducking curtsy, and Johns carolled in a pleasing voice:

"Somebody else is getting it, getting it,
Right where he handed it to me!
Somebody else is getting it, getting it,
Right where the chicken got the
A-X-E.
Somebody else think's he's in fine.
But he'll get his—where I got mine.
Somebody else is getting it, getting it—
Right where he handed it to me."

"And like you that, madam; like you that, right well?" inquired the singer.

"Ho, yes, sir. Hi likes to see yer 'appy. Hit's just ha-been ha-growin' h'on yer fer the larst 'ole week." She clasped her hands to her bosom, gazed

coyly down the length of her full black alpaca skirt to the toe of one broadly upturned flat shoe, and then gazed longingly up to Boggs' smooth and cherubically innocent face. She sidled a thought closer and ducked her poor head as if about to lay it on his manly shirt front.

"Mr. Boggs, sir—Hi mykes bold to harsk you somethin'—h'it hain't h'on my h'account, now h'is hit?"

Solemnly the man replied, "Coddles—to be honest we must oft be cruel. It is not—on your account."

Coddles showed her disappointment by banishing her smile wanly from her face. "No? Wot then?"

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" He glanced behind him and spoke mysteriously. "It is because —I have—arrived!"

"Harrived, sir? W'ere?" queried Cod-

dles, glancing around her fearfully the while.

"Here!" exclaimed Johns, swelling out his chest. "I have never realized till now the joy of being out in service. To watch! To anticipate every wish. To serve!" He bowed low as a menial might, and then poor Coddles stared at him and withdrew slowly from too close proximity to her erstwhile beloved as he exclaimed dramatically, "Love? Fortune? Marriage? Bah! I ask only a serviceable feather duster and a good, kind, loving master!"

"The marster, sir! Hour marster!" cried Coddles, in wide-eyed amazement. Then she glanced fearfully behind her. "Ho, lud! Hi thought has 'ow you wuz ha-callin' 'im ha ragin' Hafrican 'iena!"

The man lifted his hands in horror. He found he could put his whole histri-

onic ability in this pleasant game of baiting the moon-struck and man-struck cockney.

"Oh, Coddles, you are dreaming! He's a dove! There's nothing that man wouldn't do—to me—if he had the chance. Why, only yesterday, when he threw the inkwell, he did it so gently that he hardly broke the skin!"

Coddles stood blinking at him. She moistened her lips once or twice, but the words fairly refused to come.

"And if I could only acquire your delicious Henglish haccent, I feel sure it would please the marster vastly."

He smiled at the puzzled female and, picking up a plump cushion, began to pet it lovingly.

"Hah! the poor nut! 'E's gone wrong h'in the 'ead," whispered Coddles to herself. Then the light of determination

came into her eyes. Not for nothing was she h'an h'Englishwoman. Britannia rules. And Coddles spoke:

"H'excuse me, sir, but that 'ere doctor wot comes to see me for the cramps—'e's hawful good, sir—h'an most h'inexpensive, too, 'e his. H'an h'if you would honly let 'im see you, sir! Per'aps now 'e might save you from ha spell." She spoke wheedlingly in the tones one reserves for children and the mentally deficient.

"Ha! ha!" roared Johns. Now, Codlums, don't."

And then he made a grave blunder in finesse. He proceeded to tickle the maiden right under the chin with the fluffy end of his feather duster.

Coddles emitted a coy giggle. "Ho, stop hit, sir. Now, you stop!" As if to shoo a chicken, she raised her apron

and shook it coquettishly at him, balancing on one foot as she spoke, and rubbing the other flat sole across an equally flat ankle. "W'y laws, Mr. Boggs, sir! W'en you gets to cuttin' hup that way—hit—hit—"

In mock sternness he replied: "Woman, have a care! Remember, there are dinner guests this evening! Reserve your emotions for the privilege of passing in the plate!"

She backed away and replied full seriously: "Yes, sir, 'e's a-comin' this hevenin', sir!"

"Who?" cried Johns.

"The doctor, sir! H'I'll tyke the liberty h'of h'a—speakin' to 'im, sir!"

"Boggs!" laughed with what seemed to Coddles like the sound of idiocy. She hardly knew whether to giggle or to scream when he made a lunge at her with

the feather duster, and as she hurried back to her neglected work she could hear the sound of his singing:

"Somebody else is getting it—getting it,
Right—where—he—handed—it—to—me!
Somebody else is getting it, getting it—
Right where the chicken got the A-X-E!"

"Poor nut!" she said again with unspeakable scorn.

While Johns pranced gayly about his work, a pretty face appeared at the casement window and an expression of mischievous enjoyment and approbation flitted across its pink and white serenity. Then the window swung in and the butler promptly went over to take toll of the

smiling red lips of its owner—Miss Florence Cole of Albany.

"S'pose you let me in," suggested the lady.

"Pleasantest duty I could have," asserted the faithful servant.

A minute or two later, Florence tiptoed into the room, whispering with a delightful air of conspiracy. "Sh-h-h! Where's Nellie?"

"Upstairs—dressing—you darling!" said T., whispering too with a right good will since that necessitated getting very close to Florence.

"Good! I don't want her to see me yet. She's getting repentant—invited me over to dinner—or maybe friend husband is getting insistent."

"Florence, I can't have you flirting with my employer," admonished T. "You

must not look above your station, my girl."

And then, with a sudden access of serious feeling, he held out his arms to his elusive little sweetheart.

"No, no! Keep to business. First, T., I must tell you that if I can't flirt with your employer, I have been successfully flirting with your ex-employé. By dint of careful handling, Mr. Tony Toler has come to see the inadvisability of starting a rival firm of his own, and is holding on to Mr. Applegate as a customer until such time as your influence gets Tony back with the Eureka plus the partnership he was promised for landing the president of the Northwestern. Now you will take Tony back, won't you, dear?"

"I? Florence, my influence with George is like that of a snowball in the

realms of Pluto! A year from now, when I cease buttling, Tony may have a couple of rival firms of his own. Oh, dearest, you are engaged to a butler; with George at the helm, you may find yourself engaged to a bankrupt."

"Leave the business of the firm to the Senator's child, T.!" cried Florence, with truthful mock-heroics. "But how is your little game working here? Is George falling for it?"

"He loathes me," replied Johns, with an expansive grin. "But, say, I'm making an awful hit with Coddles!"

"Yes, but I'm afraid I'm not! Dreamed last night that she was after me —with one of those scalloped edge bread knives. But—here in spite of my nightmares I've been wide awake enough to get this for you."

Johns smiled wisely and dodged the lit-

tle package held out to him. He held out his duster and smiled wryly as he explained. "No, you don't! That's how I got this one!"

"But open it, please."

Her obedient swain opened a package that disclosed an atomizer. He looked at her inquiringly, and made a still more wry face as she distilled a little of the fragrance directly under his nose. Then she rose on tiptoe and whispered a few directions into Johns' ear. He smiled blandly as she drew from a pocket in her black satin cape a long veil of white chiffon and handed it to him.

Then he protested for a moment: "Oh, but Florence, that's so old!"

"Well, wait until you see how wonderfully it works."

"T.! T.!" called Nellie's voice, and Florence promptly skipped across the

room and hid behind a screen in a fashion brand new to dinner guests. But the dinner guests seldom come early and interview the servants.

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" warned the butler, concealing the atomizer and veil in his pockets. In another minute Nellie Nettleton came sweeping down the stairs, looking like the queen of the night in a misty frock of pale lavender tulle and frosty silver. T. bowed low.

"Oh, please! I wish you wouldn't bow —that way—you seem so like—a servant!" she protested.

Johns managed to look more like a servant than ever as he sanctimoniously put his finger tips together and replied: "Thank you, Nellie, some day I may ask you for a reference."

"And I promise to give you any kind you want," agreed Nellie, laughingly, but

a quick look of hurt came across her face as she looked at the meek attitude of a servitor that T. had assumed. She caught his hands apart and spoke with a new note in her voice. Miss Cole registered a thought that several people's love affairs were becoming badly snarled!

"Oh—T., you are trying to make the best of a horrid situation—and it's very brave of you!" cried his employer's wife.

"And so much cheaper! George hasn't been able to charge me up with a hundred dollars for seven whole days!" said Mr. Johns lightly, in no wise forgetting just where Miss Cole was concealed.

"And I hope he never will again. Have you seen anything of my notepaper —it seems so natural to get to depending on you for things, T. I want to drop a line to mother."

"Yes, I put it away myself. Here you are, Nellie. Allow me—my fountain pen!"

While these gallantries were going on Florence tiptoed upstairs. That remarkably level-headed young woman had no thought of being jealous, nor had the lover of such a calm and self-assured young person to put more than play-acting fervor in his pseudo-courtship of even so charming a woman as Nellie Nettleton. The same spirit of faith did not prevail in the Nettleton ménage!

"George hasn't come home yet, has he?" asked Nellie.

Virtuously T. replied: "Not yet. He's probably very busy at the office!"

Nellie looked up sharply. "Why did you emphasize at the office?"

"Oh, nothing! Nothing! Indeed it was nothing, Nellie," replied Florence's

pupil in finesse with an elaborate air of having something to conceal. Nellie looked at him thoughtfully for a moment and then made an effort to return to her writing. But this was a case of "methinks the gentleman doth protest too much," and a gesture of annoyance heralded the fact that Mrs. Nettleton had resolved herself into an investigating committee of that suspicious sounding phrase.

"Er—T. You might—er—just call up George and see—if he has been kept at the office—that is if he's there."

"With pleasure," and picking up the phone Johns called sweetly into the mouthpiece while a heavy thumb held down the receiver hook and his voice was audible no further away than the room.

"Three four three two Rector, please," said he, glancing towards the evidently nervous Nellie with a smile.

"T., have you noticed lately what a curious change has come over George?" asked Nellie, addressing the envelope of her letter with the elaborate care a woman feigns for her task when her mind is elsewhere.

"In what way?" asked T., with the unconnected phone still held patiently to his ear.

"Oh—it's hard to say exactly; but he seems so troubled and discouraged. And then his manner—to me! Why only the other day—you remember when he came home and you and I were fixing the roses in the vase. After you went out he looked at me in the oddest way and said —Er—he said, 'Nellie, I should think that fellow was quite strong enough to lift a bunch of roses by himself.' Then he uttered a profane word and stalked out of the room. Now, T., what could he have

meant? Though I don't suppose you see, either."

T. saw well enough, but he replied in a ruminative tone: "I wonder!"

"The poor boy doesn't seem well and I'm afraid I haven't been very helpful to him."

"No?" asked Johns. "Excuse me—Hello—they don't answer? Then never mind—thank you, Central, for trying so hard!"

"Oh—well, perhaps he's on his way home for dinner," said Nellie in the ill-at-ease tone of one who is offering a sop to her own fears. "And I have a nice little surprise for him. You know he's been wanting to have Florence over—but—well, I demurred. And then last night I saw her with that young salesman—Toler—the one George dismissed for insubordination—and I thought you had

suffered enough—I mean, T., I phoned to-day and asked her to come for dinner, though what she's doing in New York I don't see, and it may be harder for you this way than not to see her at all!"

"You are magnanimous to me," replied that Chesterfield among servants. "Personally I shall endeavor to serve her soup without spilling it down her back!"

Mrs. Nettleton fluttered to her feet. "Oh, T., I'm afraid I did not give enough weight to your being in love with her—I'm afraid I thought too much of George."

But now a little monitor from the stairs signaled and Johns glanced quickly through the window to behold his master returning. Johns promptly fell on his knees at her side.

"Nellie, you think of everyone! You're an awfully generous woman.

You are an intelligent woman and what is more, you are a good woman!" he cried, wondering if his stock of adjectives and the tremolo in his voice would last long enough to have the proper effect on George—"returning unexpectedly."

And suddenly becoming conscious of the invading presence, Johns hitched a bit closer and leaning over the unconscious Nellie he went on: "And if I ever have the chance to prove to you—"

"Nellie!" sounded an outraged voice.

Johns leaped to his feet and assumed his most butlerian pose.

"Oh, George! How you startled me," cried Nellie, with just the inanity upon which Johns had counted.

"Did I? Indeed!" replied her husband, studying the faces of mask-like innocence before him.

"Yes, you did. You know I'm not

strong—you know I'm nervous—you—"

"Never mind your nerves. Sit down!" commanded the offended husband harshly.

"Oh, well—if you employ that tone, I won't!" retorted contrary Nellie, turning and starting up the stairs. "If you are going to be brutal the minute you come into the house—I wish you wouldn't come at all." And with a sound like the beginning of a storm of emotion Nellie swept her frosted silver draperies up the stairs, while a little figure in white scuttled up ahead.

Nettleton turned angrily to Johns, but that gentleman, with the deferential air of a servant, forestalled him.

"Pardon me, sir. Shall I take your hat and stick?"

"No!" cried Nettleton savagely. "Think I'm such a nincompoop that I'm not capable of taking off my own hat?"

"Oh—allow me, sir!" cried the servitor, with an air that was worthy of Bret Harte's immortal Heathen Chinee in its mastery of bland "ways that are dark."

"Keep your hands off!" shouted Nettleton.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Will you have your slippers, sir?"

Nettleton grabbed the decanter and with shaking hand poured out a drink of such proportions that Johns trembled for him. Then he added vichy in a flood, and set down the untasted glass with a bang.

"Give me my slippers, and be quick about it; that's all you're fit for," he commanded.

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir," replied his sweet-mannered menial.

While Johns got the slippers Nettleton sullenly unbuttoned his own shoes.

His amiable butler knelt with a great shaking over the master's unnecessary exertion and pulled the shoe daintily away from the tired right foot. Nettleton jerked the offended member wildly away.

"Oh, pardon me. Did I tickle you?" asked a voice of sweetness like to that of slow-dropping maple sap.

"Look here—what's the matter with you, anyway?" demanded Nettleton, donning his own slippers.

"With me, sir? I don't know, I'm sure. But I hope it is nothing to annoy you. To what, may I ask, do you allude?"

"To everything. First you seem so darn well satisfied—and ever since I caught you drunk that day you've been wearing a smirk—that—I couldn't pull off with a monkey wrench. . . . Well?

Why don't you answer me? Why is it?"

"Perhaps, sir, I'm beginning to realize my opportunities," replied Johns suavely.

"What—opportunities?" demanded Nettleton.

"Of serving—Mr. Nettleton!"

The two men eyed one another for a moment as bull moose must eye bull moose in northern wilds, and as all male things do when there is the shadow of the thought of a woman between them.

"You get out of here!" commanded Nettleton.

"Yes, sir—very good, sir," and catching up the discarded shoes of his beloved master, Johns started from the room.

"Hey, there! Tell Mrs. Nettleton that I want to see her—in here—at once!"

"Yes, sir—with pleasure, sir," and the man started upstairs eagerly. The master intercepted him.

"No, you don't! I'll just do that myself. And look here—if I ever catch you hanging around her again—I'll break—your—darn—neck. Get me?"

"Yes, sir, I get you. . . . In future I'll try to be more careful."

Nettleton glared at him and started upstairs to summon the other party to this intrigue that he sensed in every fiber of his tired, overwrought being. But a quick change of purpose drew him to the phone, which he rattled savagely in the dire need of taking out his wrath on someone.

"Hello! Hello! *Hello!* Lenox 6170. *Lenox* 6—1—7—0! And don't be all day about it. Hurry. *I said hurry. Well—can't you get that number? I'll report this! I'll*—oh, hello, is that Mr. Vanderholt's home? *Oh!* This is George. I say, Van, I want you to come over—will

you—right away? . . . Of course it's important—What? No, I can't tell you over the phone. There's something in the way. There's always something in the way."

And a glance of savage contempt winged its way to the doorway that framed the unctuous presence of the butler. The wornout master replaced the phone on the table and dropped into a chair, fanning himself vigorously.

"Er—pardon me, sir—but won't you take a little stimulant?"

"Mind your own business!" was the ungracious reply as the butler advanced with a look of concern and gave all his attention to mixing a drink of exact proportions.

"Yes, sir. I only took the liberty because you looked tired and overworked," replied a voice of sweet sympathy.

Nettleton fairly snatched at the glass. "Yes, I am overworked. I am working like a dog! And you—up here—loafing around all day—and I don't know what!"

"No, sir. How should you, sir?" purred the other man in a voice no untutored male could have hoped to compass.

Nettleton started at him for a moment. Then he lifted a shaking hand to a clammy brow and, as if startled by its coldness in the midst of July heat, he suddenly buried his head in his hands.

"I'm sorry to see you so," said that arch hypocrite, Johns, and then removing the atomizer from his pocket, he sprayed a generous dose of its rich perfume across Nettleton's shoulder. "I'm particularly sorry at the thought of a break-down for you, since your splendid work in the

Eureka Digestive Pill Company is partially on my account. And so I hope I don't offend you, sir, in offering a suggestion. No? Thank you. Very good, sir. Then since you are so overworked, why not run off for a little trip somewhere and rest—for a week or two?"

Nettleton sprang to his feet. "What's that?"

"Oh, of course, I mean, sir—that you would take her with you!" ventured the other, as if that personal pronoun could have no other possible antecedent than the wife of George Nettleton.

The husband struggled with his fury. "Oh, you do? Then let me tell you one thing, Mr. Johns, and I want you to remember it. My personal and domestic affairs are not mentioned in the contract."

"There is nothing in it to the contrary!"

remarked Johns, taking the contract from his pocket and starting to unfold it for reference.

"There is in this house! And there's going to be from now on. Get me?" he snarled.

"Yes, sir. I've *got* you! And whenever you can think of any other little matter that would please you, I trust that you will—er—bring it to my attention."

And Mr. Johns replaced the contract in his pocket with the thought that it was humiliatingly impossible for a fellow to have to be in the position of butler to his own partner—and that, after all, it was a shame to torture poor old George so. Which was the first kindly thought he had entertained of "poor old George" since the partnership was very young. A most unexpected fruit of Mr. Vanderholt's malicious contract was that! However,

there was no sprouting plan of love in the other man's heart as he rapped out his answer and ultimatum.

"There are several little matters I am going to bring to your attention. . . . And if you don't look sharp, the first one will be an undertaker!"

Finger tips placed together with great precision, and heels clicked into the first position for bowing, Johns replied: "Yes, sir. Very good, sir!"

And a door slammed after the retreating form of his master.

## CHAPTER XV

### IN WHICH GEORGE FINDS THAT THE SPOILS ARE NOT ALWAYS TO THE VICTOR

AND now with great attention to detail Johns prepared to carry out the remaining chapters of Florence's instructions. He had not quite yet fathomed into what waters all this planning and simulating of intrigue was to lead him.

Perhaps if the edges of several near-by and neatly yawning precipices had not been veiled in a bit of mist, he would have ventured no further. However, in carefree wise he drew out Florence's white veil and sprayed it from the little atomizer—and then he stuffed it carelessly into Nettleton's coat pocket, where its incriminating presence was sure to make itself felt.

Finally he helped himself to a sheet of blank note-paper from the box over which he had appointed himself guardian, and then crossing to the table sank against it in pretended absorption, with that sheet of white paper as the focal point of his burning eyes.

And then at the particular moment when he became aware of Nettleton's reentry to the room, he implanted on that product of the Berkshire mills one fervent and lingering kiss. Almost as a continuation of that single movement he had torn the "letter" to shreds before Nettleton could project himself across the room in an effort to possess himself of that suspicious-looking document.

"Well—what's that? Don't you hear me speaking to you—what is it?" he demanded.

"It is one of the personal—or domestic

My God! Nellie, it makes me sick. Sick!"

"Well. You told him to do it, didn't you? In fact you *gave* him the duster on his birthday," said Nellie, in a voice that might have been oil on troubled waters.

"That's right—take up for him—as you always do!" shouted her husband freshly aggrieved as each damning bit of evidence piled suspicion upon suspicion in his tired brain.

Johns found his work well done and slid gracefully from the room and up the back stairs to attend to the proper entertainment of the hidden dinner guest, who seemed almost doomed to go dinnerless whenever invited to the Nettleton home for that repast.

"And why shouldn't I defend him?" de-



"FLORENCE! YOU QUEEN!"



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TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
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manded Nellie. "Someone should. Isn't that poor fellow doing everything on earth to please you?"

"*Aghr*-r-r-r-r!" snarled the badgered man, lifting his clenched fists in imprecation. "To please me! Yes, he is! He's pleasing me every minute of the day or night—and so are you. And now, Mrs. Nettleton, I want to know why and what you are writing to that man!"

"I! What man?" cried Nellie, in amazement.

"What man! T.! T.! T.! T.! Boggs Johns. That's the man I mean, and you know it," cried her husband in biting sarcasm that rose at last to a dominant note of despair.

Nellie was ready with an application of balm for his wound.

"Why, darling, you are nervous! Why

in the world should I write to T. when I have him here all day long and can tell him what I choose?"

George gazed at her wildly. The brazen effrontery of the woman!

"All right! Have it that way! What are you saying to him all day long—and what is he saying to you? That's it—look innocent—get out a look of pain from the rag-bag of your emotions and put it on for me. I'm the monkey all right."

Nellie's voice took on the maternal tone of one crooning over an indisposed child. "My precious George! You're not yourself. You need a rest. Now, why don't you run off somewhere for a week or two?"

A look of intense cunning crossed Nettleton's face. "Aha! You too! That's what *he* wanted! To get me out of the way! Now then, I want to know what it

means—do you hear me? Look me in the face, Nellie, and tell me if you can?"

He seized her roughly by the arms and shook her none too gently. On Nellie's face were two expressions mingled—the womanly instinct to glory in the strength of her man, even when he exerts it against her, and a little feeling of horror at what George seemed to insinuate against her.

"George!" she began, pitifully. *"George!"* she cried in the righteous indignation of injured innocence. She had sniffed the heavy fragrance of the perfume that scented his coat! With the elusive quality that serves women often in the place of strength, she stepped back from his gripping hands—and in sheer surprise he let her go.

"Well? What are you getting at?" he demanded harshly.

"Your coat sleeve. Smell it!"

"What? What? My coat—well—well. By Jove, that is funny! I wonder where I got it!"

"That's what I want to know! Where?" demanded the lady stiffly.

"How can I tell. . . . It must have been here—I've been—I've been noticing something for the last five minutes," he replied, not at all relishing being put on the defensive.

"I should think you might. Now, sir, *where have you been?*" demanded Nellie drawing herself up regally to every fraction of her slender height.

"Been? Why, just where I said I'd been—just where I said—"

"Stop! Don't make it worse by lying!" cried the outraged wife.

Nettleton wondered just how the tables

had managed to get turned. Somehow things had a strange way of reversing themselves in his experience. He had been quite sure of losing that fateful hand of "show down" in his office, and he had won. He had gloated over his big bully of a partner for two weeks, and had acted as much like a gadfly and a scourge and a blistering sun at once to the wounded thing that had once been the gay and restive Johns as he knew how.

And now the totally unexpected was happening. Even as once he had wrested victory from defeat, now he was finding the spoils of his triumph most undesirable. The victor's crown seemed to be of corrugated iron, set with thorns of steel. And things at his office—sixes and sevens did not express it. He wondered if he could be having a nightmare—or "katzen-

jammer!" He would try the efficacy of words to break the bad spell that seemed woven about him.

"Nellie!" he cried in pained reproach. "That's a nice, raw deal to give a tired business man when he comes home. If you don't think I've been working, there's a telephone. Why didn't you call me up and find out?"

"I did. Twice," replied Mrs. Nettleton sarcastically. "And central always said the office didn't answer!"

He faltered a fatal second in reply, "Oh, well—that may be, too. Our phone has been out of order. That's it—laugh! Well, don't believe me if you don't want to. If you like—I wasn't there! If it suits you better—I haven't seen the office for a week!"

"Aha! At last we are getting at the truth," cried Nellie in such a wild access

of jealousy that she did not in the least recognize the germs of the same fatal disease undermining George's sanity, too. "Well—I know a phone which is not out of order!" And she crossed to the telephone on the library table and snatched down the receiver.

"And what are you doing now?" shouted Nettleton.

"Calling up my lawyer, Mr. Vanderholt! Hello! Hello! Operator, give me Lenox—oh, never mind, I don't want them," as George broke in loudly:

"You may save yourself the trouble. He'll be here in about five minutes!"

Nellie stared vaguely. It is so simple to threaten to do a thing. But to find it done for you—when the desperate step you are considering is fairly to flaunt in your husband's face that there is such a thing as divorce, whereby a neglected and

wronged wife may seek freedom from the bond that shames her—and then to find yourself fairly cast off before you have a chance to solace your pride by making an exit from your husband's life, in spite of every plea to stay.

Nellie had expected George to grovel at her feet and beg her to let him explain —only for the love of heaven not to call up Van! And now he coolly informed her that she might have saved herself the trouble of phoning, as he had anticipated her desire to gain freedom! Everything fairly whirled before Nellie's eyes. She tumbled in a forlorn little heap in the most comfortable chair in the room and began slowly and methodically to cry.

"Well—I'll see Van," she sniffed. "And I want you to know—that is the end of everything. Every-y-y-y-y thi-i-ing! And I was once so ha-a-a-a-

appy! What will mother say—Oh-h-h what will my mother say!"

The picture of woe was too much for Nettleton's pride. He crossed the room with the light of love that should burn out Nellie's tears kindling strongly on his face.

"Oh—my darling—" he began.

And then central, who occasionally feels a praiseworthy duty to see that you get any number you may have inadvertently called, in order to counterbalance all those broken promises, "Yes—I'll call you," earnestly jangled the telephone bell of the Nettleton ménage. Nettleton crossed the room quickly and savagely to boot and shouted into the mouthpiece: "Hello! No. I didn't call—ring off!"

By now Nellie was weeping in good earnest and fumbling in her sleeves and the bosom of her frock for the handker-

chief that no daughter of Eve and the French styles has ever found near her in her hour of need. Of course, the loan of a masculine handkerchief at the crucial moment has probably been first aid to many a slow-flowering romance. But, on the other hand:

"Here, dear, take mine!" said Nettleton, searching his coat and looking doubtfully on the soiled gray product of the necessity for mopping one's brow in moments of great emotional stress—and on days of July heat! Then a spot of gleaming white caught his eye. Of course he would not have a decent handkerchief in his old alpaca house coat. But there lay a fresh, clean one peeking from the pocket of his blue serge. Just the thing! He crossed and extracted it. It came in a billowing mass of chiffon. Without let or pause, he gave all his attention to stuffing

it into the bosom of his shirt. Nellie felt commotion and dire portent in the air, and mastered her tears.

"What is it?" she inquired, rising languidly. And then languor gave way to violent activity. Nellie seized an end of the tell-tale chiffon and flaunted that warlike emblem of peace in her husband's face.

"Aha! Her veil!"

A man would have said, "Caught with the goods!" in the same tone of quiet satisfaction at bagging his prey.

"Her veil? Whose veil?" asked George, with innocence that seemed all the more pretended because of its genuineness.

"Smell it!" accused his wife, thrusting it under his nose, so he had perforce to comply with directions.

Nettleton stepped back and smelt of

his offending coat sleeve. There was something decidedly "rotten in the state of Denmark." But Nellie did not want a husband who stood trying to decide on whys and wherefores—she wanted wild protests and offered proofs of innocence which she might scornfully reject. Not getting what she wanted, not even knowing what she wanted, Nellie had a desperate feeling that all things had come to an end. She collapsed into a chair, laughing and sobbing wildly.

"Nellie! Nellie! For heaven's sake, don't!" begged her husband in utter desperation. Suddenly he flung himself on his knees at her side and reached wildly for one of the hands that was pressing a fold of lavender tulle to her tearful eyes. The 'phone rang long and insistently. Still on his knees, the harassed man started to answer its summons and then decided

that the more insistent matter was his wife's grief. "Darling, speak to me. Nellie, Nellie—won't you even look at me?"

Mingled laughter and sobs were his reply. Again that viciously clear little bell sounded its summons. The man swung round on his knees and shook his fist at it. "That's it! Go on—damn you! Go on!"

A bitter wail arose. "And now you're cursing me-e-e-e!"

"I'm not cursing you—I'm cursing the phone. Oh, Nellie—for mercy's sake don't go and have hysterics. Listen to reason first."

Sobs and laughter again were the refrain of Nellie's reply and the door-bell rang an antiphony to her grief.

"Oh, my God! There's something else —why don't the house catch fire and

finish it!" cried the kneeling man to high heaven.

Nellie only sobbed louder and the correct and impersonal butler swung through the room on his way to answer the summons of the door-bell, with never a glance for the domestic tragedy before him. But Nettleton sensed a derisive grin that Johns must at least be thinking.

"Nellie! Nellie! You are only making a fool of yourself. I don't know a thing about that smell! I swear it! Not a thing," protested the kneeling figure. "Please, please control yourself. Don't kick—you'll send your slippers flying, Nellie, Nellie, listen to reason."

The door opened and the butler announced with due panoply and form: "Mr. Vanderholt."

Nellie sat up and spoke in a perfectly

natural tone. "Who did he say it was?"

"Only Van—darling—just dear old Van. And you have come round, darling. You are all right now—aren't you?"

Whereupon Mrs. Nettleton lapsed into hysteria again.

"George, what is it? Is she ill?" cried Vanderholt.

"Something, I fancy, had disagreed with her," ventured Johns.

"Get out of here!" thundered Nettleton, his prostrate position at Nellie's feet militating against the effect of his words.

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir," said the imperturbable wrecker of homes, vanishing nonchalantly to the realms of the back stairs.

"Now, old man, what is it?" queried Van with ready sympathy.

"Everything!" cried Nettleton, rising

slowly from his knees. "And I'm supposed to dress for dinner with one hand and treat a case of hysteria with the other. Help me, will you, Van? Take her head, will you? Just now she is acting as if it were the lightest part of her."

And Nellie was conveyed from the room to the accompaniment of vigorous protests of voice and wildly kicking and plunging feet.

"I want a divorce—absolute—with alimonee-ee-ee-ee. I have the evidence," shrieked Nellie.

Most feminine hysteria is uncontrollable because the desperate woman who is struggling with her emotions does not exert her will and call it to take the helm and guide her feelings. Nellie now simply let jangled nerves and wild emotions sway her, and her pitiful conduct was as uncontrollable as it was unnecessary.

"Upstairs?" suggested Van, carrying his part of the burden.

"No—we'd bump her on the stairs—library—come on," replied the husband methodically.

Coddles had heard the commotion from the kitchen and felt decidedly out of things since there was no one to discuss developments with her. Her feelings were divided between pleasurable interest in the "doings" and a horrible certainty that "Mr. Boggs, sir," had that " 'uzzy" concealed above stairs! So she invited herself to the scene of action and entered wringing her hands with appropriate show of emotion.

"Ho, Lud! Ho, Lud! Ho, Lud!" she moaned as she rocked across the room.

"Ho, Coddles, stop that and make yourself of use. Open the library door," ordered Nettleton.

Coddles obeyed.

"And telephone the doctor," came the next order sharply.

"Yes, sir. Wot number?"

"Six five, Columbia. Hurry!"

"Yes, sir," said Coddles in wonder. She really "'ad not knowed that lydies tooked on like that." As she started for the phone, earnestly repeating to herself, "Six-five Columbious—Six-five Columbious," she beheld her ancient idol Boggs sitting on the steps. The instinct of the chase led her to dally with sickness and perhaps death and sidle toward him, but even as she went her poor mouth was twisting into a repetition of the number she must call.

Johns had been sitting on the steps registering his amusement at the plight of another, but at the threatened onslaught of Coddles he fled. She pursued to the

door, and when it was slammed in her face she looked at it in such gentle wonderment that it seemed as if some instinct of pity must draw T. Boggs Johns back to repair the havoc he had wrought.

Coddles shook her head sadly and meandered to the phone.

"H'are ye there?" she cried. "Hi say, h'are ye there? Six-five Columbious." She managed to articulate aloud after twisting her mouth into forming the syllables again and again and then almost losing them at the critical moment. "Six-five Co-lum-bi-ous!"

"Well—well, are you getting him? Will he be here soon?" cried her master, entering as one distraught from the library, whence still issued sounds of wild sobs and mad laughter.

"No, sir. 'E shut the door in my face, sir."

"Who? The doctor? Great Jehosophat! are we all mad?" shouted Nettleton.

"No, sir—Mr. Boggs, sir!"

In helpless fury the man eyed her for a moment. Evidently there was no help for him anywhere.

"Oh, you idiot! Here—go in to your mistress—she needs you."

And Coddles fled from one "lu-na-tick" to another—even while the lawyer, who had started it all, came wearily into the room. One bout with the train of circumstances he had set in motion, and therefore was legally responsible for, was about enough for one Thomas J. Vanderholt. But he was not as yet quite through with the case of Nettleton & Johns, nor was the case quite through with him.

## CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH GEORGE NETTLETON FINDS HIMSELF EXPLAINING MATTERS TO THE LAWYER

"Now, old man, what's all this silly rubbish about divorce?" asked Vanderholt lightly.

Nettleton came to him wearily. Here was his present help in time of trouble. Good old Van—he would save his friend! Peace settled on the soul of George Nettleton. It was a wonderful thing to have a loyal and faithful friend such as Van—and to have that friend a lawyer. Van would understand and sympathize. Nettleton smiled cheerily for the first time since entering his topsy-turvy abode that evening.

"Well—it's this way, old man. I got some cologne or something on my shoulder. I don't know where, of course; but nothing on earth can persuade the lady that the head of some other lady has not been reposing there. Just whiff that!"

The faithful and understanding friend "whiffed that"—and stepped back smiling with understanding—cynicism.

"Shades of the chorus!" cried the loyal refuge in time of trouble. And he sank into a chair and doubled up with enjoyment. George had been having his little fling, thought Thomas J. Vanderholt—well, it was not surprising that old Georgie would tire of trotting in double harness so peacefully with even a pretty woman like Nellie. Men were like that, reflected the man who *was* like that.

"Well? What's the matter with you?" asked Nettleton impatiently. He was

waiting to be rescued, not attempting to furnish the comedy in a burlesque show! He sniffed that coat again to try to discover the strange magic it worked on all those who inhaled its perfume.

"Chorus—Nix! This is the Chicago River!!" he cried, and as Van only laughed the more, he withdrew from the doubter and then came again close, trying to persuade himself that a few drops of perfume could not blot out a friendship. "That's right. Make game of it! Enjoy yourself! Howl! But see here, Van, you understand it, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, I understand, Georgie! Georgie!" and Van rolled onto a couch and kicked up his heels in coltish glee. Well, there was one good thing about the sad affair, he reflected to himself. He had his old running mate—his pal—back again, and he had missed him since mar-

riage had sobered Georgie down so intensely!

"You believe me, don't you?" began Nettleton pleadingly, and then his expression turned from hope to incredulity and from incredulity to anger as Van replied lightly, "Say, Georgie, you remember little Bonnie Carmichael up in the chorus of—"

"All right! Don't believe me!" screamed Nettleton. "But don't talk about any chorus ladies to me. There's only one lady I want to discuss—or perhaps two—Nellie and that darn lucky Queen of Hearts that Johns drew. If you haven't brains enough to understand the present mix-up, here's something you can understand. *I want that contract canceled!*"

Van had not ceased to chuckle. "I thought you thought it great."

"I did—until I saw it work—and now it's rotten!"

Van sat up, and resumed some of his manly dignity along with his legal manner. "Well, what other reasons have you for wanting it canceled?"

"A hundred and fifty other reasons. First, it isn't legal!"

"That's what T. says. Why isn't it legal?" asked Van with studied emphasis.

And even as T. had replied a week—a short week—ago, so George whined his plea now. "Because all the advantage falls on his side—and the rank injustice falls on me. And that won't stand—at law."

"Oh, yes it will," replied Mr. Vanderholt, smiling a noticeably superior smile. "Yours is a personal agreement between two private individuals, and it stands—at law. It can be annulled, but only by

mutual consent—or by one of the parties breaking it—deliberately."

"All right! I'll break it! I'll fire that fellow—now!"

"Good," said Van, nodding his head in seeming approbation—and then he came up and placed a well-groomed hand impressively on the other's shoulder and added the drop of venom that clinched the situation: "And forfeit all your interest in the business?"

Nettleton stopped short in horror like a suddenly checked young horse that longs to show his mettle. "Eh? Well—then it's a frame-up! Now that goes to show me the kind of a friend you are. So that's what you've done to me. Fixed me—so I can't even kick him out! I've got to keep him for a year, have I?"

Van smiled patiently. His manner had an added touch of patronizing superiority

since he had learned of his old friend's little—er—indiscretions, but no moral scruple would prevent him from remaining George's friend and he had no thought of preaching loyalty to Nellie any more than he had ever thought of trying to hold the partners in leash. To him the law stood as a power to arrange difficulties —not to prevent them.

"You've got what you wanted, haven't you, George? You're making a butler of T., and since he left the office you're doing twice as well as you were before."

"I'm not," confessed Nettleton. There was abject failure in his voice. "The business is running down. One man can't do it all. Say, old man—I might as well make a clean breast of it. The firm almost went to smash, and to—er—save it, I took Miss Parker out to lunch. Sa-ay, you don't suppose that's where"—and he

made a sudden dash for the library. But even as he pulled open the door the sound of hysterics came caterwauling out, and it hardly needed Van's hand on his arm to stop Nettleton's mad course.

"Where are you going, you idiot?" asked the lawyer severely.

"To clear things up with Nellie. To tell her how I had to work to save the firm and her living!"

"You'll clear up nothing with Nellie while the present storm is raging. Especially if your story embraces your cogent reasons for taking a blonde stenographer out to lunch. Come, George, suppose you brush a few cobwebs away in your discourse with me. Just why *did* you take Miss Parker out to lunch?"

George looked his fill at the skeptical face, and then buried his own face in his

hands. "Oh, what's the use? You're not going to believe me anyway."

"Out with it, Georgie," commanded his present superior officer.

And so Georgie told the sad little story of how his grief at the thought of Nellie alone with Johns all through the holiday when he must work had made him bitter to her, and how she had retorted with a taunt that he would find these pleasant enough since his stenographer was working with him—and so he had adopted her suggestion and taken Sally out to lunch.

That little accident had saved the firm, for gratitude to him and jealousy at seeing Florence Cole at a nearby table with Tony Toler had made her confess the plot to start a rival firm and promise to wreck it.

"So Miss Cole is dining with Toler.

Well, that will be pleasant news for Johns," sneered the lawyer. And George was too deep in his own sorrows to add that the Applegates had been there, too; all of which would bear its own fruit in due season.

"It's Johns that is at the bottom of it all. Here I am doing all the work of two men and having to support him, too."

"Oh! I see which way the wind blows —you want him back at the office!" whistled Van.

"No, I don't! I want him out of this house! He's a curse! And one way or another—*you've got to rid me of him! You saddled me with him—now you get him out of my house!*"

Mr. Vanderholt chuckled amiably: "I must! Ha! Ha! And on what grounds must I get rid of him for you?"

"On legal grounds . . . Van—he's in love with Nellie—and she's in love with him."

"What! In love with Nellie! Georgie, my boy, what you need is a brain storm expert—not a doctor! And so that is the reason for stenographers' lunches and chorus girls' scent bottles!"

"I'm not crazy—nor trying to drown my sorrows in cheap perfume. Van, it's true! For a week he's been swaggering around here as if he owned the place. He drinks my whisky. He smokes my best cigars. And then—he's—always—with her! If I come in suddenly, he jumps with a guilty start—and looks like a poisoned sheep! Why, Van, I tell you plainly as man to man—"

He interrupted himself suddenly as the cheery butler came swinging down the

stairs, doubling with himself in his rôle of valet.

"Er—pardon me, sir, but shall I lay out your—er—violet pajamas—or the pink ones?" asked that gentleman, with insulting inanity in the midst of tragedy.

"Get out of here—or I'll lay you out!" cried his distraught master.

But the smile that Johns wore never faded. He had been sent down to make that interruption by Florence, with whom he had been sitting at the head of the stairs shamelessly and heartlessly eavesdropping. And Johns found his "little general" worth obeying.

"Van—Van," screamed Nettleton. "Did you see him grinning at me?"

"No," comforted the other. "He looked to me like a highly respectable grave digger!"

"Well, I'll dig his all right and plant

him—in a violet-colored shroud! . . . Oh, Van, Van, would you believe it—they are writing notes to each other right under my nose!"

Evidence! At this Vanderholt straightened up and began to consider the case of his friend's broken heart worth considering!

"Correspondence! Now, you're talking! Produce it!"

"I can't. They destroy it!"

"Good work!" laughed Van, sympathizing with the clever—rather than with the sorrowful.

"What?" cried Nettleton, gauging anew the depths of disloyalty.

"I mean—er—how does Mrs. Nettleton seem to bear up under the trying circumstances?"

"She!" replied the sorely tried husband, marching up and down the room in a man-

ner that combined the air of a martyr and a caged lion. "Why, Van, she carries it off with an air of brazen innocence that would knock you cold. When I put it up to her a while ago what do you think she did?"

"What?"

"Just looked at me, with her big, beautiful eyes, and then attacked me about that confounded cologne!"

The lawyer chortled. "Ha, ha! By Jove—that was clever. Ha, ha!"

"Well, it won't go down with me! Now, then, Vanderholt, what are you going to do about it?"

"I? See here, old sport, you seem to think this is my divorce!"

"Well, you saddled me with Boggs, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't! Your own fool temper

did that. And more of the same plus a chorus girl or two is doing this!"

Nettleton looked at his hopeless last hope in utter despair tinged with disgust. Then he threw up his arms and plunged across the room to the window, where Nellie's screams and his own disquieting thoughts tinged the crimson July sunset with deep, dark gray. Everything in all the world seemed hopelessly and irretrievably against him.

## CHAPTER XVII

### IN WHICH FOR THE SECOND TIME T. BOGGS JOHNS HOLDS A LUCKY QUEEN

"I've got it!" Van's voice greeted his host's ears with celestial music.

"What?"

"We'll call T. in here and get him to dissolve the contract—with your magnanimous consent. Get the idea?"

"You mean—good, by Jupiter! It's great!" shouted Nettleton.

In fact it was great—it was almost too good to be true! The master of the house crossed the room and touched the electric annunciator.

"But don't tell him that I want it," he

counseled, "and don't tell him that business is rotten, either."

"Oh, no, no! You leave it to me. I owe him an uppercut myself!" remarked Thomas J., with deep feeling.

Johns entered cheerily. He had adopted a certain mincing ballet step the startling effect of which, in conjunction with his own avoirdupois, was particularly calculated to annoy the beholder—if that beholder chanced to be a frazzle-nerved business man like Nettleton.

"Er—pardon me—you rang?" questioned his care-free voice.

"Yes, I rang!" replied the master sharply. "What did you think it was—the angels calling you?"

"No, sir!" replied the other sweetly. "I used to believe in angels—but somehow lately, sir—"

"Shut up!" roared the maddened Nettleton.

Van came between them with a great air of being a board of arbitration. "That's right. Now, T., listen. George and I have been talking matters over and have come to the conclusion that this contract is—well—a little rough on you." And Vanderholt smiled most urbanely as he prepared to "slip one over" on the unsuspecting Johns, who stood listening with a particularly simple expression on his good humored face.

"Yes, sir?"

"And so—partially at my advice—he has generously consented—to let you off."

"You mean for a day, sir?"

"Oh, no, no!" explained Van to the simple fellow. "I mean altogether. In

other words he's willing—under certain conditions—to allow you to cancel!"

Of course the five thousand dollars that were to be forfeit on cancellation looked fully as large to the young gentleman about to embark on matrimony as it did to the disembarking Nettleton. So he spoke in a low voice of respectful astonishment, lifting his hands the while in deferential protest:

"What, I! Cancel my contract! Oh, Mr. Vanderholt."

"Here! Here! Cut that butler stuff! It doesn't go with me," said the gentleman who had invented the post of butler for T. Boggs Johns, Esquire.

And Mr. Johns gave his natural voice free rein for a moment.

"All right! I will! And why should I cancel it? Isn't George at the office—

working his head off—piling up receipts and even improving on the color of my pills? He's doubling the business every week or two—according to his account—and is crediting half the profits up to me!" Mr. Johns paused and smiled. "On the other hand, here am I, in a happy home environment with my little trusty feather-duster. A regular rest cure snap—good whisky—fair cigars—and—er—" He paused elaborately.

Mr. Nettleton stepped forward with a dangerous glitter in his eye. "And *what?*" he questioned ominously.

A wail, followed by a series of wild shouts of laughter, penetrated the room from beyond the library door. Johns glanced that way, and took a sudden forward step—then he checked his involuntary progress and assumed a pose worthy of a long line of butler ancestors. His

finger tips were together, his eyes closed and he spoke in a tone of unctuous joy.

"A good, kind, loving marster; who is all my simple soul desires." And bowing as one old to service and happy therein, Mr. Johns silently departed from the presence of his peers.

Nettleton shot forward with doubled fists. Mr. Vanderholt was sufficiently calm to stop him, even though he too felt a desire to chastise the bland individual who had deprived him of the half of the five thousand dollar concession which he had been mentally sharing with his old friend George.

"Steady, George—leave this to me! Well, T., how about it?" he demanded in a business-like tone.

That gentleman swung around in the doorway with an air he hoped Florence was getting from the stairway above.

"What! Cancel my contract? What I want is—to renew it!"

Mr. Nettleton lifted haggard eyes of despair to his unsuccessful legal adviser. "Can you beat that, Van? Can you beat it?"

Mr. Vanderholt had heard a perfectly clear "checkmate," and he found the victory going without doubt or question to the enemy. He rubbed his chin in a mood for desperate things. What was to be done he did not know—but it would be done—of that there was no question.

"Well, no, old chap—I'm horribly afraid—we can't," he confessed, and then started at an apparition that entered from the library.

It was Coddles. But such a wan, pale Coddles, with the light of madness in her faded blue eyes and an aureole of faded brown hair standing in wisps about her

head. She drooped wearily against the door and spoke in a voice of limp terror.

"Ho, Mister Nettleton—Mister Nettleton! She's ha-takin' hon somethink hawful, sir! Ha-grittin' of 'er teeth han' ha-stretchin' hout hof 'er legs loike this!"

And in awful pantomime Coddles gritted long, strong, yellow teeth and stretched out the favorite maroon-and-white spotted calves into a pose of iron rigidity.

"Good Lord! What is it now?" cried the lawyer.

Nettleton was coldly ironical. "It is pathetic business for divorce proceedings —for benefit of counsel. Walk into my library and get a line on it!"

"One minute, George," interrupted his "loyal friend" Van. "How about a retainer!"

"Retainer! You go in and restrain

her!" ordered Mr. Nettleton far beyond any indignation at his friend's scheming calculation. The "Marster" turned to Coddles.

"Coddles, when you are married your troubles surely do begin. My good woman—take my advice—and remain a maiden."

And as if that horrible fate were actually made hers by the black magic of that cruel wish, the would-be Mrs. Boggs fell prone to the ground! At last she rose slowly, in her eyes a certain dazed air of agreeing with what she had just heard.

"Ho, dearie me! Dearie me! Hi'd rawther do the cookin' than be ha-waitin' hon ha lun-att-ick!" she ruminated. "Hi wonder now did the Missus catch it from poor Mr. Boggs—hor hif 'e caught hit from 'er!"

As she staggered against the table,

Boggs came jauntily into the room bearing in one hand a red rubber ice-bag, and in the other a bunch of great crimson roses. Coddles gazed at him for a moment and her expression changed to one of alarm—suppose them two lun-att-icks was to get together now! My word, there would be doin's! Han' the marster—'e would be jolly well dangerous! Aloud she marshaled her thoughts:

"Don't you go hin there, Mr. Boggs, sir! Don't you do hit! 'E'll murder you —'e will! 'E'll bash you hon the 'ead, sir —'e'll—"

But now Miss Cole entered on the scene where she had been interminably long a silent, if active, force.

"Coddles!" she commanded. "You go back to the kitchen this minute—and let poor Mr. Boggs alone!"

Thus ever does the female of the species

protect her helpless mate from the depredations and onslaughts of another woman!

Coddles measured her foe scornfully.

"Now, don't you worrit, miss. Don't you worrit. 'E's yours fer hall hof me—han welcome! Hi wouldn't marry that lobby 'eaded h'ijjit—no, not hif 'e was willin'! Hi hain't ha-goin' to spend my 'oneymoon in no bloomin' bally bug-'ouse!" And the door slammed on Coddles, glorious even in retreat.

Undaunted by the scorn of her foe, Florence laughed. "Who were those flowers for—Nellie?"

"Partially, miss," said Johns, grinning and striking the ice bag. "I thought it would please the marster if he knew I was thinking of her!"

"Well—stop thinking of her—and think of me," suggested Miss Cole.

Johns dropped his burdens and his manner of being out in service and liking it, and became a mere man alone with the girl of his heart and liking that. He came eagerly forward to take her in his arms.

Florence warded him off. "No, no, no —I mean—business!"

"So do I," replied her lover advancing with a very-sure-of-itself smile.

"Yes—but not that kind," replied Miss Cole, checking him. "T., you've got to make George discharge you!"

Mr. Johns shook his head sadly. "The contract won't let him. If he throws me out as an asset, I come back to him as a liability. Oh, Florence dearest—we've only a mere matter of eleven months and one week to wait now. We nailed him with the cologne—but the stuff evaporates—we didn't clinch it!"

"Yes—I see!" remarked pretty Miss Cole dreamily. "Let's have a little look at our pet trouble maker."

Miss Cole sat studying the bit of glass and metal and rubber for a moment. "My, my, my! and such a little thing!" she remarked to whom it might concern.

Then she turned the little spray directly at her own soft hair—even while a wrinkle of disgust crinkled up her nose in a manner that made her look too distinctly kissable for any mere man to endure. So Mr. Johns—first endured—and then embraced, adding a little spice of pity for all the men in the world who couldn't have a Florence of their own.

But the strong scent of that fateful perfume drove him back and he cried in dismay—"Good Lord, Florence—what are you doing?"

The girl rose airily and put the little demon atomizer that was to demolish many things on the table. "I'm trying to become George's little correspondent—and if this doesn't work—I know something else that will."

"What?" cried Johns, half in scepticism.

"It depends on you."

"Florence—tell me how. You'll find me very dependable!"

"Dependable? Yes—Mr. Johns, so I've noticed. Are you aware of the fact that not ten minutes after becoming engaged to me, you sat down deliberately and gambled away my chances of being married?"

"Your chances of being married—" cried Johns blankly.

"Yes. What do you think I grew up

for?" replied that frank young person, with an engaging smile.

"Oh—but, dear—I didn't endanger them—I only postponed the event one year. What I really forfeited was my happiness—and the purple color of my pills. They are polka-dotted now. But our honeymoon will be all violet and silver and rose—"

"Very pretty color scheme, Boggs; but you don't expect the only daughter of Senator Cole of Albany to marry a—butler—do you?"

"Well, no, I don't," confessed the man sadly. "Dearest, eleven months is an eternity to wait—and in degrading service. What shall I do? Can you think of a way out? You are so clever, dear—I'm sure you can. You always can—"

"Stop singing it, dear. I take only one

lump of sugar in my coffee. Never did like too much sweet. Here's the point; Like every man on earth, you go sailing around, on your own account, till you land in the flypaper—with all six feet! 'And then you begin buzzing as sweetly and charmingly as ever you can for the lady of the house to come and help you out!

"Well, Mr. Meek and Lowly—suppose I do help you out; suppose I do forgive you, as a fool of a woman is always doing. *Suppose I put you back in your own office, where you belong! Suppose I do! That's the point! What do I get out of it?"*

Solemnly he replied: "I guess I don't seem like much of a success at the partner game—but, dear, we'll make a success of our partnership! You get anything on

earth I own—or ever hope to own. And me—and my life-long devotion. Is it good enough? Will it do?"

"Be careful, T.," warned Florence, with a happy little catch in her voice.

"Square my account, dear—first with yourself and then with George—and whatever you say for me to do—I'll do it," declared T.

The girl rose on tip toes and whispered again in his ear.

"But how dare I risk that—dear?" he cried. "It will mean five thou—"

"Then you won't do what I ask you now?" queried Miss Cole, with a cold sound of hurt pride in her voice.

"Yes—I will!"

"Without regard or fear of consequences."

"I swear it," he said solemnly.

"On your honor?"

"Yes—on my honor—as a gentle—as a butler!"

"All right."

Again she rose to the occasion and whispered to him. She was ready to reward his faith.

A happy smile overspread his features—and he fairly gasped: "What! You mean it?"

"Yes."

"Sure?"

"Of course."

Joy fairly romped across the features of T. Boggs Johns. He knew that rescue was at hand.

*"Florence!"* he cried, "don't try to keep me off this time—for you haven't the strength!"

And the butler at Mr. Nettleton's home took the pretty dinner guest in strong and loving arms. And the guest of honor at

the Nettleton dinner locked her soft white hands about the neck of the butler and rocked in happiness.

Whereupon the library door opened and the master stood in astonishment.

"Boggs!" cried his "master" sharply drawing out the little red book of fines even as he spoke.

The lovers sprang apart, and Nettleton turned loftily to Johns. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

The unabashed T. smiled at him pleasantly and blew a kiss to Florence as he replied from the doorway, to which he had gone with alacrity on that young woman's signal: "It means—Mister Nettleton—that for the second time—in your presence—I was holding *a lucky queen!*"

Nettleton divided a scowl impartially between the departing Boggs and the remaining lady.

"Good evening, George. You seem surprised to see me," smiled the girl in her most elaborate society manner.

"Yes, Miss Cole, I am! You have no right to interfere in this affair—especially in my house. And you have no right to help him out—none whatever!"

"No, my cordial host? And what are you going to do about it—after you have told me how glad you are to see me?"

Nettleton strode toward her angrily. This impudent young person should soon see that he was not a man to be trifled with. "Do!" he cried wrathfully, "I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll—"

And then, as he reached the unflinching enemy, he stopped suddenly, sniffed like a hound that is catching a scent—and backed away.

He had caught a scent—*the* scent—that had wafted Nellie into hysteria. He con-

tinued backing away until he reached the library door. And never more desperately did Horatius guard the Tiber bridge than George Nettleton took his stand for his goddess and the dire possibilities that lay beyond that door if once Florence Cole stepped over the threshold and Nellie had a chance to add to her damning list of divorce evidence.

"Why don't you do it, George?" asked Miss Cole sweetly. "Why, what is it?" she added innocently, as he looked at her suspiciously and sniffed his sleeve with evident distaste.

"Ha! ha! nothing—nothing at all—only—ha! ha!—well, you see—Nellie—she—"

"Oh, yes, I know. T. told me she was in the library—has a headache or something. Poor dear. I'll run right in and

see her," remarked the girl with a most elaborate air of innocence.

Horatius was ready to die for that bridge. He could not throw himself on the mercy of that perfume that smelled like "the Chicago River" with anything like the degree of trust that the Roman had felt in "Father Tiber." There were too many women in this affair.

"No—no, please, I wouldn't—not now. She's not at all well, Florence.—In fact she's ill—and won't be able to appear at dinner," declared the husband wildly.

"Ah, that's too bad. What seems to be the trouble?" asked Miss Cole sweetly and sympathetically.

"Er-er-er — Ha, ha. It's — er — a — *nerves!*"

"Nerves! Good gracious. I thought the trouble was with her nose," said Flor-

ence, wrinkling her own pretty little nose as she looked quizzically at the excited guardian of the library door.

"Eh? What do you know about that?" he cried, coming toward her almost dazedly.

"A lot. Now look here, George, how much would you give to get out of this mess—entirely?"

"You mean all of it—Boggs included?"

"Boggs included, here! But suppose I put him back in the office, where you need him as badly as he needs you. Suppose I do that, Mr. Bones and Fat—what is it worth—to me?"

"Florence—I'd give a thousand dollars—cold. Yes, fifteen hundred! By Jupiter—I'd give two thousand—twenty-five—"

Florence permitted herself the luxury of a girlish giggle, even as she held up a

solemnly admonitory womanly hand. "There, there, George—stop bidding against yourself. I'll take the first offer of a thousand—in the form of a wedding present! And here's a little something to keep you from forgetting it."

And Florence picked up from the table the innocent looking little atomizer and sprayed it straight in the face of the astonished Nettleton. And even as he stood staring in wild astonishment that threatened to turn into anger at any moment, she slid by him into the library. She was unmolested in her going. George Nettleton was gazing in horror at the little ornament to a lady's boudoir that had nearly wrecked his home. At last he banged it down and a look of intense dislike distorted his features—here, he felt, was some more of the devilment of that arch-fiend, Boggs! He apostrophized the air. "Boggs! I

knew it! Boggs! That poisonous scorpion! That wart—that toad—that grinning, chuckling, chattering ape!"

And even as he hurled anathema at the name of Boggs, Nettleton danced about in such fashion that he fairly earned for himself one of the epithets he was applying to another. And he was displaying a particular phase of masculine anger—it has a way of calling the other fellow names that best apply at home!

"Say, George!" cried his astute lawyer, whirling into the room, "Florence just came into the library and I rushed to you at once. Did you notice a similarity between the perfume she is using and the stuff on your coat?"

"Yes, I did! And that devil is responsible! That eagle in a dove's nest! That serpent—that—"

"Who?" cried Vanderholt. It hardly seemed possible that his old pal, Georgie, would so describe Florence Cole.

"Georgie" undeceived him at once. "He's gone beyond his contract this time, and I'm going to sue him for damages, and, what is more to the point, I'm going to damage him before the suit!"

"Here! Cut that! I'm the referee of this affair, and you leave T. Boggs Johns to my tender mercies. I'll straighten you out before I'm done with him."

"Straighten me out! Me! Haven't you found out who the crook is yet? Say, if you can't get him legally, I'll—" cried Nettleton fairly dancing in rage. And then from his shoulder he beheld Nellie approaching, very tearful as to eyelashes, very pink as to nose and very belligerent as to pose. At once he wilted

a bit and tried to sneak upstairs. Settling with Boggs was one thing—meeting with Nellie was quite another. She would have recognized Florence's fatal perfume by now!

## CHAPTER XVIII

### IN WHICH THE LUCKY QUEEN DEALS THE CARDS

"WHERE is he? Oh, where is he?" called Nellie in her most militant tone. Her voice made such deeds as the slashing of the Rokeby Venus would seem quite femininely possible. George reached the landing—and temporary respite was in view. Nellie could never again work herself up to quite this apex of anger.

"George! Come back here," she ordered.

There was nothing to do but obey. He came to face the music, and found it was playing a song of triumph for him—and a stormy prelude for T. Boggs Johns.

"I didn't mean you, dear!" cooed Nellie, and then in strident tones she concluded: "I mean T. Boggs Johns! How dare he do such a thing—to you and me!"

"Ah—of course—that's different! How dared he?" beamed her husband.

"T. Johns! T. Johns! Come here," called Nellie.

Mr. Vanderholt was completely and utterly bewildered, and when he approached Nellie pacifically and tried to pacify her, she turned on him, too.

"And you, Mr. Vanderholt! I never understood before that you were at the bottom of all this trouble!"

"I?" cried the astounded man.

"Yes, you! When our boys were getting along so happily and peacefully, then you stepped in and upset everything! And you did it on purpose—just to charge them legal fees!"

Florence and George had not expected to do anything in unison—but they found themselves laughing in chorus at the evident discomfiture of the light of the law when Nellie charged at him as everything feminine does when a marauder threatens the sanctity of her nest—provided that marauder is so directing his attack that her maternal instinct is properly aroused.

"Oh, now Nellie—don't!" pleaded the lawyer at the bar of justice. "This had been going on for two years before I came in! Florence knows that—I leave it to her! Now, am I the one responsible?"

"You are!" remarked Miss Florence curtly.

"There, I knew it!" cried Nellie, and as he backed away protesting, three voices rose in accusation.

"I tell you it wasn't my fault! I was only trying to teach them a valuable les-

son they both needed," said Solon, accusing himself even as he excused.

"Shame! Shame!" taunted Florence. "You knew all the time just what sort of a row you were stirring up, and deserve everything that's coming to you."

"You saddled me with Boggs. You did it deliberately. You knew in advance just what he'd do to me," cried the ungrateful holder of the pair of sixes.

But Nellie's hysterical voice rose above them all as they protested in a jumble of syllables. "It was perfectly horrid of you. My innocent husband, who called you his best friend! And poor old T."

Vanderholt raised his voice above all the mêlée of noise. "Here! Here! Stop it, will you? All of you! Stop it! I never knew a poor devil who didn't get in trouble when he tried to help his friends! Now as for all this useless row—"

"By the way—Mr. Vanderholt, you didn't know anything about the incorporation papers Tony Toler was trying to draw up for a new firm that was counting on the business of the Northwestern Drug Company to help it get on its feet? You didn't advise Mr. Toler 'to go to it'—did you, now by any chance?" remarked Florence quite casually but with most malign purpose.

Mr. Vanderholt was saved the embarrassing necessity of framing a reply that would contain of truth a modicum and of saving glibness enough so that he would not be forcibly ejected from the house which he had entered as a confidential friend. To be discovered as a friend of the "confidence man" type would hardly do.

But everyone gave their strained attention to a remarkable apparition that

staggered into the room. It was Coddles. In her hands she bore a tray with the gingerly care of one not quite used to serving higher up than kitchen and scullery. On it were cocktails. Coddles was engaged in trying to keep them from swirling about and overflowing their brims, and in attempting to keep a wee cap that was pinned on one side of her scanty locks from slipping all the way down her sloping forehead into her right eye.

"Coddles! What's this? Why isn't Boggs serving those cocktails?" demanded her master, severely, as he gazed upon the strange apparition that lent little zest to the appetizers she was bearing. Coddles started and looked reproachfully at him as one or two liquid globules splashed down on the tray.

"'E harsked me to serve 'em for 'im, 'e did, sir!"

"Oh, he did!"

"Don't get excited, George," counseled Florence.

"Yes, Darling—please!" begged Nellie, laying a restraining hand affectionately on his arm.

Mr. Nettleton waved them aside in lordly wise.

"What else did the boss of the establishment have to say?"

Coddles squared herself for her coup d'état. "'E said to tell you, sir, that if you didn't loik hit, you could charge him hup with hanother 'undred han' go to the devil."

No one dared smile, as Mr. Nettleton strode majestically to the bell button and pushed it.

"All right, we'll see about that," he remarked, grimly.

"George! What are you doing now?"

said Nellie, who was unable to let bad enough alone.

"I'm ringing for Boggs! If he doesn't come in *I'm* going after him and bring him in."

But Boggs could nevermore be brought in. In his stead there appeared upon the stairs a gentleman in immaculate full dress. Except that he wore no side-whiskers he looked much like the vanished butler of the Nettleton household.

"You see him, Van!" shouted Nettleton. "He's quitting! He's breaking the contract! That means five thousand for me! He's—"

"Not much I am! I want to tell you something about that contract," announced Johns, coming down the steps in propria persona for the first time in twenty-one long days.

"Yes—and I want to tell *you* some-

thing about that contract!" echoed Nettleton.

Then together, with pointing fingers accusingly held out, the partners went at the little game of baiting one another as of yore, and exactly as if no chastening three weeks of serving and being served had passed.

"It is stated in the contract—" cried two angry voices.

Miss Cole came between them; and even as she spoke, uncertainty, followed by the dawn of joy, transfigured the angry faces that had been hissing with venom at one another.

"Here, here, here—stop it! There isn't any contract!" announced Portia.

"What?" chorused two voices.

"What's that?" added Nettleton.

"How's that?" appended Johns.

*"There never was any contract!"*

"Why not—may I ask?" remarked Mr. Vanderholt with what grace he could master.

"To begin with, it wasn't legal!" said Portia, with a charming little judicial air.

"And why wasn't it legal?" asked Vanderholt in his most legal tone.

"Because the contract—fundamentally—was based on a game of poker. Now poker is gambling—and gambling is illegal—"

The girl stopped with an air that was half apologetic for knowing so much more than her lords and masters. It is charmingly romantic for a youth to rescue a maiden from the breakers—but when the case is reversed there is a little awkwardness about the necessity of putting at her disposal the poor thing she has saved. And when it comes to rescuing from the breakers of life—and the law—your fiancé

and the husband of your "dearest" and most jealous friend—that is a dangerous pastime. But a few innocently joyous monosyllables reassured her.

"Eh?" cried Nettleton.

"Oh!" echoed Johns.

And "George!" caroled Nellie.

Then Florence knew her work was done —and well done.

"Now, look here, Miss Florence," confessed Vanderholt, brazenly, "I knew that; but how in the name of glory did you know?"

"How?" demanded erstwhile butler and master.

"I asked a lawyer—a real one. And, boys, I ushered in a couple of new partnerships. I helped Tony Toler select a solitaire for the finger of Sally Parker, and I suggested that when he brought in Appleton, of the Northwestern Drug Com-

pany, you would probably stick to agreement and take him into the firm."

"Appleton? I thought he had gone a-glimmering!" exclaimed Johns.

"Bring along your Tolers!" beamed Nettleton.

"Florence, you ought to run the business," murmured her ecstatic fiancé.

"You boys had a real business and you made a farce of it. But now—I know you have the real stuff in you—and you will make it a real success," suggested Florence, getting ready to resign the helm to T. and lean on his strength a little, even as she had been using her cunning for his sake through a long week of weary planning.

"Tell us how?" begged the two men meekly. And Nellie registered a vow that she wouldn't cry even if they didn't pay any attention to her all evening.

"It's like your digestive pill—depending on which is more important—the outside—or the inside."

"It's the outside," declared Nettleton, with a pleasant smile for the inventor of the purple coating.

"It's the inside," declared Johns, with a courtly bow.

A brand new quarrel of a brand new type seemed imminent.

Florence smiled and shook her head at the boyish extremes to which these two grown men seemed bound to go.

"It's the combination," said she.

"It's the combination!" they echoed.

"Say, George, I've got to get two remarks off my chest," declared his erstwhile butler.

"Go ahead, old man—what you say goes."

"Well, then, what I said about Van still goes."

"Yes?" said Van uneasily.

Johns ignored him and addressed his remarks to Nettleton. "He's a hell of a lawyer!"

"And the other remarkable observation?" prompted Florence.

"Is with your permission, dear, addressed to Nellie."

Nellie preened herself expectantly.

"Say, Nellie, would the hostess be disappointed if this became my party and I phoned to the Valthorpe Roof for a table? I'd be afraid to eat here."

"Indeed!" pouted Nellie.

"Indeed! It is just possible that Coddles' nerves could not stand the strain of serving Mister Boggs, sir."

"Want to go, Florence?" asked Nellie.

"My lucky queen of hearts and I are

the sort of partners who always agree about the things we want to do," declared Johns, happily.

"That's the only kind of partners there are going to be—in this whole firm," declared Florence, putting her hand confidingly in her lover's and smiling at him so sweetly that he charged up a hundred kisses against her in the little red book of his heart.

"Which remains to be proved," declared the undaunted Mr. Vanderholt.

And that suggests that he may have been a rather clever lawyer after all!

THE END

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